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# Playing with the Global

Family Dynamics and International Education  
in a Marketised Preschool Landscape

*Sammanfattning:*

Att spela med det globala

Familjedynamik och internationell utbildning  
i ett marknadsiserat förskolelandskap



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### **Abstract**

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The surge in popularity of international schools around the world has extended to the domain of Early Childhood Education and Care. In the past few decades, international preschools have become more commonplace in marketised educational contexts. This thesis studies families who enrol their children in international preschools in Stockholm, Sweden, framing the rise of these institutions as embedded within two aspects of globalisation: the growing worth of transnational assets and the increasing prevalence of transnational families, encompassing those raising their children in foreign countries and those composed of parents from different national backgrounds.

The study, departing from Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology, examines preschool choice from two angles. The first inspects the social recruitment of international preschools through statistical analysis of individual-level register data concerning families. This analysis considers social characteristics such as education level, income, and migration histories. Secondly, through interviews with middle-class parents, it explores families' choice-making processes, examining how they navigate their children's preschool options and ultimately select international preschools.

The results show that international preschools cater to families with strong and weak social positions and those with Swedish and foreign backgrounds, which evidences a widespread belief in the value of transnational attributes. However, differences between international preschools' specific languages highlighted that some languages are more closely linked with social advantage than others. Preschool choice was found to be shaped by complex dynamics, wherein social class, gender, migration experiences, family structures, and parenting cultures intersected with the local context and supply of preschools, both international and not. This first encounter with institutionalised education emerged as a situation where families renegotiated their family identity and priorities. Due to preschool children's young age, transnational assets were not always easily transmitted or acquired, especially when parents desired divergent international and national investments. Such acquisition demanded considerable efforts in parenting, commuting to international preschools, and altering family dynamics. Preschools were shown to serve as providers of transnational assets and as possible hindrances to the particular forms of internationality families wished to nurture in their children.

*Keywords:* Sociology of education, international preschools, preschool choice, parenting cultures, family dynamics

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# Table of Contents

FOREWORD.....	9
ABBREVIATIONS .....	11
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	13
Social Structures of “the International” in Education.....	15
The Swedish Preschool Landscape.....	17
Forms of International Education in Sweden.....	21
Aims and Research Questions.....	23
Structure of the Thesis .....	23
CHAPTER 2 FAMILIES, INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, AND PRESCHOOL .....	25
Educational Practices and Social Class .....	25
Gatekeeping Internationality .....	29
International Schools, Migrant and Domestic Families.....	33
Conceptualisations of Mobile Social Classes .....	33
Mobile Families, Educational Choice and Parenting Practices .....	35
Local Families Making International Choices .....	39
Nuances in Dichotomy.....	40
The Particularities of Preschool.....	41
Interlingual Families and Language Practices .....	43
The Gendered Practice of Raising Children.....	47
Care and Education in Preschool Markets .....	50
Contribution of the Thesis .....	55
CHAPTER 3 THEORY.....	57
Framing Educational Choices Relationally .....	57
Studying Families In and As Relational Spaces .....	59
Capital: National and International.....	61
Choice, Dispositions, and Practices .....	65
Preschool as a Site of Socialisation .....	67
CHAPTER 4 METHODS, MATERIALS, AND POPULATIONS .....	71
A Geographical Delimitation of the Preschool Landscape.....	71
A Population of International Preschools.....	74
Forms of Internationality, a Presentation of Preschools.....	75

Studying Social Structures through Register Data.....	77
A Relational Approach to Interviews.....	78
Recruiting Parents .....	79
Interview Occasions and Content .....	81
Interview Analysis.....	83
Presentation of Interviewed Families.....	84
A Complementary Population of Pedagogic Personnel.....	85
Ethical Considerations.....	86
<b>CHAPTER 5 PRESCHOOLS IN A SOCIAL SPACE OF FAMILIES .....</b>	<b>89</b>
Families and their Social Characteristics .....	90
Unveiling Oppositions, Hierarchies, and Distinctions .....	94
Opposition 1: Resource-rich Swedes and Resource-weak Recent Migrants.	96
Opposition 2: Highly Educated Public Sector Families and Affluent Private Sector Families .....	98
Opposition 3: Established Migrant Families in the Natural Sciences and Families in the Humanities and Social Sciences .....	100
Professions in the Space.....	101
Summary of the Space.....	105
Preschool Enrolment Patterns.....	106
Comparing International and Non-International Preschools.....	106
Hierarchies and Distinctions in Language Provision .....	110
Summary of Chapter .....	116
<b>CHAPTER 6 TRAVERSING THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL 119</b>	
Care and Education in a Unitary System .....	120
Buying One's Way Out of the Swedish Model .....	123
An Internationally Framed Early Years Education.....	124
Being International Enough for International Preschools.....	129
Boundaries Between Swedish and International.....	133
Encounters with Swedish Cultures and Language .....	133
Swedish Preschools as Homogenous Spaces .....	139
Educational Distinctions in the Publicly Funded Sector .....	140
Blurring the Borders .....	143
Summary of Chapter .....	146
<b>CHAPTER 7 BURDENS OF LINGUISTIC ADVANTAGE .....</b>	<b>149</b>
Becoming Parents and Multilingual Families.....	150
Experts, Horror Stories, and Personal Experience .....	152
Investing Time at the Right Time .....	156
A Stepping-stone in School Pathways .....	158
Worth a Commute .....	160
Dealing with the Mother's Tongue.....	165
The Efforts of Mothering .....	169
Multilingual Mothers .....	173

Summary of Chapter .....	176
CHAPTER 8 FOLLOWING THE LEADER.....	179
An Underlying Gender Structure.....	180
Reproducing Occupational and Familial Structures .....	182
Driving Forces and Accompanying Partners .....	183
Career Progression and Labour Market Realities .....	184
Moving and Moving Home.....	187
Mothers Leading Choices .....	191
Children and Preschools as a Parental Resource .....	195
Negotiating Future Moves.....	199
Summary of Chapter .....	203
CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS .....	205
Returning to the Points of Departure .....	205
Preschool Choices in a Socially Structured Landscape.....	207
Families' Constructions of National and International.....	210
Negotiating Linguistic Development .....	213
Situating Preschool Choice in Migration Dynamics.....	215
Concluding Remarks.....	217
SAMMANFATTNING: ATT SPELA MED DET GLOBALA.....	221
SUMMARY: PLAYING WITH THE GLOBAL.....	229
APPENDICES.....	239
Appendix A: Supplements to Chapter 5.....	239
Appendix B: Preschools Attended by Interview Participants' Children.....	242
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Parents .....	246
Appendix D: Interview Participants in a Social Space of Families .....	247
Appendix E: Parent Participants .....	251
Appendix F: Interview Guide for Staff.....	253
REFERENCES.....	255
Literature .....	255
Other Sources.....	266





# Foreword

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to all the parents who generously took time out of their busy lives with their children to share their stories with me. You are the foundation of this thesis, and I hope you feel I have treated our conversations with the respect they deserve. I also extend my thanks to the staff members who participated. Although your interviews became less central to the final direction of this thesis, our conversations were invaluable to the study.

Thank you to my supervisors Emil Bertilsson, Håkan Forsberg, and Maria Törnqvist. Emil, thanks for always making time and your keen eye for detail. Your guidance has been invaluable in shaping my study into its final form as a thesis. Håkan, thank you for your enthusiasm, critical insights, and invitations to present at workshops and conferences, both nationally and internationally. I have also learned a lot from our discussions and collaborations (along with Andreas Alm Fjellborg) within the “The First Choice” project. Maria, your analytical skills have been invaluable and helped me to see new aspects of my data. Thank you for inviting me to join the Cultural Matters Group and the Cultural Sociological Symposium. Thank you also to Esbjörn Larsson for your support in the first phase of my studies and the opportunity to work in “The First Choice” project alongside my PhD. I am also grateful for the chance to contribute to the upcoming anthology (thanks again to Håkan and Andreas as well). To Mikael Börjesson and Erik Nylander, thank you for your comments on my 10 and 50 percent texts. Amélie Beaumont, your comments and suggestions on my 90 percent manuscript were a huge help, as were yours, Mikael Palme, thank you!

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East Rise, Falmouth

Jennifer Waddling

# Abbreviations

ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
GMC	Global Middle Class
ISC	International Schools Consultancy
LEA	Local Education Authority
MCA	Multiple Correspondence Analysis
OPOL	One-Parent One-Language



# Introduction

Across the globe, there is a reported growth in the popularity of international schools, a trend attributed to the combination of evolving migration patterns and the emergence of new forms of internationally orientated schools facilitated by the enactment of neoliberal educational policies.<sup>1</sup> In recent decades, this trend for international education<sup>2</sup> has trickled down to society's youngest children. In the domain of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), preschools providing foreign language and multilingual instruction, following international curricula, and pledging to foster international dispositions in children are becoming more common. This development suggests that we are witnessing the rise of international preschools,<sup>3</sup> providing parents with the possibility to opt for international educational pathways for their children, not only throughout their compulsory education years but as early as preschool, when they are mere babies and toddlers.

The young age of the children attending international preschools sets them apart from international schools. In contemporary society, there exists a distinct conceptualisation of preschool-aged children as inherently different from school-aged children,<sup>4</sup> thereby shaping the pedagogical priorities and approaches of preschools in general. Rather than the more academic focus of schools, preschools give precedence to cultivating the fundamental skills and concepts deemed essential for a

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<sup>1</sup> Tristan Bunnell, *The Changing Landscape of International Schooling: Implications for Theory and Practice* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2014), 1–14; Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future', in *International Education and Schools: Moving beyond the First 40 Years*, ed. Pearce, Richard (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3–24.

<sup>2</sup> The term international education is used here, and henceforth, to refer to internationally-orientated education offered in specific institutions, such as international schools. This is a particular use of the otherwise broad term. See Nadine Dolby and Aliya Rahman, 'Research in International Education', *Review of Educational Research* 78, no. 3 (2008): 676–726.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrike Deppe, Jasmin Lüdemann, and Heiko Kastner, 'Internationalisation, Stratification and Elite Formation in the German Education System', in *Elite Education and Internationalisation: From the Early Years to Higher Education*, ed. Claire Maxwell et al. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 309–30; Jürgen Gerhards, Silke Hans, and Sören Carlson, *Social Class and Transnational Human Capital: How Middle and Upper Class Parents Prepare Their Children for Globalization* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 126; Aaron Koh and Li Ziqi, "'Start-up' Capital: Cultivating the Elite Child in an Elite International Kindergarten in Shenzhen, China', *Oxford Review of Education* 48, no. 6 (2022): 727–42.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Gabriel, 'Growing up beside You: A Relational Sociology of Early Childhood', *History of the Human Sciences* 27, no. 3 (2014): 116–35.

child's comprehension and interaction with the world around them. Moreover, the dependency of children in their early years necessitates a closer connection to the familial and caregiving realms than their school-aged counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Thus, despite preschool embracing the pedagogical philosophy of integrated care and education, it remains shielded from the logic of formal learning and educational certification. The same holds true of international preschools, which, while providing unique offerings, primarily their linguistic programmes, are rooted in the prevailing ECEC philosophy. Consequently, examining families' choice to enrol their children in international preschools sheds light on the intersection of early childhood upbringing and internationality. Furthermore, it places the dynamics of families at the forefront, where complexities of parenting, influenced by factors such as social class, gender, culture, and migration, can be examined within the context of encounters with institutionalised ECEC.

This thesis investigates the decisions made by families in Sweden who opt for international preschools for their children, aiming to illuminate these intersections. Families are conceived as the primary social context for children, serving as the institutions to which they are born and exerting significant influence on shaping their lives.<sup>6</sup> However, while families can have diverse constructions,<sup>7</sup> this study focuses on those with the largest stake in the raising of their children: parents.<sup>8</sup> These families function as the unit of analysis in the thesis.

The inclination to expose children to international environments extends beyond the decision to enrol them in international preschools. It reflects a parental movement focusing on nurturing transnational characteristics in children<sup>9</sup> and the available resources for teaching young children a second language. This trend is intertwined with the current wave of globalisation that shapes the daily lives of individuals. As all areas of culture and consumption become transnationalised, the general worth of transnational assets rises, fueling an intensified quest for their acquisition.

Concurrently with the quest for transnational assets, an increasing number of individuals are relocating from their countries of origin, driven by necessity or aspiration, to forge permanent or temporary homes in foreign nations. As a result, more people are accumulating experiences in new countries of residence. This phenomenon extends even to the closest relationships, families. An increasing number have undergone a process of transnationalisation, raising their children

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<sup>5</sup> See Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962) for a historical analysis of the construction of childhood and stages of childhood.

<sup>6</sup> Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Scott R. Harris, 'What Is Family Diversity? Objective and Interpretive Approaches', *Journal of Family Issues* 29, no. 11 (2008): 1407–25.

<sup>8</sup> However, it should be noted that within the interviews with parents, which will shortly be addressed, the study was open to any caregiver. The call for participants was addressed to parents/carers as to not exclude any individual that may have a key role in the children's upbringing.

<sup>9</sup> For examples of literature aimed at parents see: Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and Marshall S. Berdan, *Raising Global Children* (Alexandria: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2013); Homa Sabet Tavangar, *Growing Up Global: Raising Children to Be At Home in the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

in new national contexts or forming families that encompass members from different national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.<sup>10</sup>

These two perspectives – the growing value of international assets and the increasing mobility and transnationalisation of families – frame the study. It examines how the choice of international preschool is woven into family dynamics and the escalating value of transnational assets. Furthermore, it recognises that the significance of such assets and choice practices is rooted in existing social hierarchies within society and the education system.

## Social Structures of “the International” in Education

The impact of globalisation on nation-states is evident in the tendencies of national education systems, which legitimise and reproduce the pressure to internationalise in particular ways.<sup>11</sup> However, international influences are not always considered beneficial. The rise of such terms as “multicultural” and “intercultural” indicates a parallel social tendency, which can be linked to the increase in certain types of cross-border mobility. Compared to the strongly positive discourse on “internationalisation”, “multiculturality” has a more ambiguous connotation in the educational debate and is widely associated with compensatory practices regarding the integration of immigrants lower down the social hierarchy. Multicultural is positioned as subordinate to international, which pertains to those with higher social positions.<sup>12</sup> This structure is mirrored in the internationalisation of national education systems, which balance the integration of migrants and promote particular transnational skills and dispositions.

At the compulsory school level, aspirations for internationalisation manifest in both general discourse and concrete curriculum development. Framing international dispositions as “21<sup>st</sup>-century skills” and “key competences” have influenced educational reforms.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, programmes such as the Global Education First Initiative have disseminated terms such as “global citizenship education”, implementing a global perspective in educational provision around

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<sup>10</sup> Dan Rodríguez-García, ‘Socio-Cultural Dynamics in Inter-marriage in Spain: Beyond Simplistic Notions of Hybridity’, in *The Family in Question: Immigrant and Ethnic Minorities in Multicultural Europe*, ed. Ralph Grillo (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 262.

<sup>11</sup> The definition of to internationalise or internationalisation is taken from Jane Knight, ‘Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales’, *Journal of Studies in International Education* 8, no. 1 (2004): 11, who states that it is ‘the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of education’.

<sup>12</sup> See Christian Joppke, ‘War of Words: Interculturalism v. Multiculturalism’, *Comparative Migration Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018); Shirley Yeung, ‘From Cultural Distance to Skills Deficits: “Expatriates,” “Migrants” and Swiss Integration Policy’, *Multilingua - Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 35, no. 6 (2016): 723–46.

<sup>13</sup> Katerina Ananiadou and Magdalean Claro, ‘21st Century Skills and Competences for New Millennium Learners in OECD Countries’, OECD Education Working Papers, vol. 41, OECD Education Working Papers, 2009.

the globe.<sup>14</sup> Working with an international perspective has become somewhat of a buzzword and commonplace within school curricula and practice – an international perspective can include partnerships with a school in another country, teaching about global problems and other cultures, and language projects.<sup>15</sup> A salient component here is the teaching of languages, a focal point that has gained prominence in curricula in recent decades.

In the Swedish context, there has been a gradual increase in the allocated hours for teaching foreign languages since the 1960s. This trend demonstrates the state's increasing emphasis on the necessity for its citizens to acquire such linguistic skills. However, within this curriculum development, subtle hierarchies have emerged. English has taken a dominant position within the curriculum, while Arabic, the country's most widely spoken second language, is not generally offered as a subject.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, this linguistic aspect of internationality can be characterised as socially stratified, where particular groups' transnational attributes are stigmatised while others are considered privileged and something to aspire to.<sup>17</sup>

Even within the realm of ECEC, it is possible to detect internationalisation processes. In Sweden, the preschool curriculum purports to be internationalised in nature, designed to address the needs of children in what is termed an internationalised society.<sup>18</sup> Management directives underscore the importance of supporting children growing up amidst intensifying globalisation, their exposure to global problems, and increasing multiculturalism.<sup>19</sup> However, international activities commonly found in formal schooling, such as foreign language learning, are limited in the ECEC context. Emphasis is instead placed on developmental building blocks, which include safeguarding the national identity through proficiency in the nation's dominant language and culture,<sup>20</sup> rather than honing skills for imagined transnational lives.

These manifestations of internationalisation, evident within national education systems, emphasise the perceived value of specific transnational skills and dispositions. Their worth extends beyond their practical applications, such as

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<sup>14</sup> See UNESCO, 'About United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization', accessed 1 October 2021, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/gefi/about/>; Massimiliano Tarozzi and Carla Inguaggiato, 'Implementing Global Citizenship Education in EU Primary Schools: The Role of Government Ministries', *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* 10, no. 1 (2018): 21–38.

<sup>15</sup> Universitets- och högskolerådet (Swedish Council for Higher Education), 'Internationalisering i skolan', 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Mikael Parkvall, *Den nya mångfalden: det nya Sverige: språken*, Riksbankens Jubileumsfonds årsbok (Stockholm: Riksbankens jubileumsfond, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Deppe, Lüdemann, and Kastner, 'Internationalisation, Stratification and Elite Formation in the German Education System', 323.

<sup>18</sup> Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), 'Läroplan för förskolan' (2019).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Socialstyrelsen (The National Board of Health and Welfare), *Pedagogiskt program för förskolan*. (Stockholm, 1987); Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), läroplan för förskolan.

<sup>20</sup> Maiju Paananen et al., 'Imaginaries of ECEC: A Comparison of Policies of Access in Early Childhood Education in Brazil, Finland, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, and Serbia', *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research* 12, no. 3 (2023): 145–80.



proficiency in foreign languages, to encompass their symbolic worth. In a globalised culture, they provide status and social recognition. Despite their internationalisation processes, schools and preschools typically offer limited opportunities for acquiring such skills and dispositions compared to the offerings of international schools and preschools. International educational institutions derive their significance at the institutional level, their differences from other settings.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the opportunities for acquiring transnational assets through the education system are predominantly limited to those with access to international schools and preschools.

A prevailing consensus suggests that international schools primarily serve specific social groups and fractions, albeit with variations dependent on the context and type of international school.<sup>22</sup> Generally, international schools are associated with privileged social classes. Originating as fee-charging schools tailored to elite, internationally mobile families, international schools had limited accessibility due to their substantial fees and the requirement for families to be affiliated with international occupational spheres. However, so-called new forms of international schools, integrated within national education systems, have been recognised for facilitating the entry of the middle classes into the realm of international education.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to this class-based distinction concerning access to international schools, a dichotomy prevails, dividing the need for international education among internationally mobile families and the desire among local families aspiring to international mobility.<sup>24</sup> The separation between mobile and local families and the delineation of needs and desires oversimplifies the complexities of families and their educational choices. The intricate dynamics inherent in families are absent from these perspectives; the transnationalisation of families can break down the dichotomy of need and aspiration.

## The Swedish Preschool Landscape

The study of international preschools and the families choosing them necessitates a simultaneous exploration of preschool on a general level to capture the intersection of child-rearing, institutionalised education, and internationality. In the Swedish context, international preschools are integrated into the ECEC sector,<sup>25</sup> which, in commonality with other Nordic countries, is recognised as a key aspect of the country's

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<sup>21</sup> Mark Fielding and Lesley Vidovich, 'Internationalisation in Practice in Australian Independent Secondary Schools: A Global-Local Nexus?', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 47, no. 2 (2017): 148–62.

<sup>22</sup> For a presentation of the different types of international schools and the clientele they serve, see Bunnell, *The Changing Landscape of International Schooling: Implications for Theory and Practice*, 1–17.

<sup>23</sup> Hayden and Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Mary Hayden, 'Transnational Spaces of Education: The Growth of the International School Sector', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 9, no. 2 (2011): 211–24.

<sup>25</sup> There are a couple of exceptions to this rule that will be later described.

welfare model. The evolution of this ECEC system sheds light on the structures that shape families' interaction with the contemporary educational landscape.

The 1970s can be seen as the origin of today's mass ECEC system, even though early years provision had previously existed on a smaller scale. During this period, attention was directed towards facilitating women's participation in the labour market. ECEC played a crucial role in enabling this shift as mothers needed childcare.<sup>26</sup> Concurrent with the state's involvement in establishing an extensive childcare system was the implementation of new parental leave policies, shaping how parents organised the upbringing of their children. These new policies, which allowed parents to share funded leave, created the expectation that both parents would return to the labour market after utilising their paid parental leave. The amount of paid parental leave days significantly increased over the following decades.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, with the changing norms of both parents returning to the workplace, the care for young children became a joint project shared between families and publicly funded institutions – an idea advocated in the country since the 1930s, emphasising the importance of close contact between children, families, and the state.<sup>28</sup> The impact of this Nordic model is reflected in parents' firm belief that professionals and institutions play an integral role in raising children.<sup>29</sup> In the Swedish ECEC context,<sup>30</sup> this belief translates to the essential role of preschools and those working within them in the family's project of educating and caring for their children.

Market-orientated reforms implemented in the early 2000s somewhat complicated this relationship, as market rationale called into question the capabilities of the public sector.<sup>31</sup> The implementation of a voucher system in 2009, which enabled parents to choose their desired preschool, served as a tool for the expansion of this key welfare institution. However, it also entrenched market and competition logic within the sector, enabling private actors to compete with public ones.<sup>32</sup> While publicly funded and adhering to national and local guidelines, the growth of these

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<sup>26</sup> Barbara Martin Korpi, *The Politics of Pre-School: Intentions and Decisions Underlying the Emergence and Growth of the Swedish Pre-School* (Stockholm: The Ministry of Education and Research, 2007), 33–35.

<sup>27</sup> Kirsti Karila, 'A Nordic Perspective on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy', *European Journal of Education* 47, no. 4 (2012): 584–95.

<sup>28</sup> Tora Korsvold, 'Dilemmas over Childcare in Norway, Sweden and West Germany after 1945', in *The Modern Child and the Flexible Labour Market Early Childhood Education and Care*, ed. Anne Trine Kjøholt and Jens Qvortup (Basingstoke: Palgrave macmillan, 2012), 19–38.

<sup>29</sup> M Alasuutari, 'Kuka Lasta Kasvatata? Vanhemmuuden Ja Yhteiskunnallisen Kasvatuksen Suhde Vanhempien Pubeessa. [Who Is Raising the Child? Mother and Fathers' Notions about the Role of Parents and Professionals in Child Development]' (Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> The ECEC sector comprises both preschools and childminders. However, the latter cater for a small minority of children and are governed by slightly different regulations. For this reason, it is only preschools that are studied in this thesis and when the ECEC sector is henceforth referred, it is only preschools that are included within this.

<sup>31</sup> Jane R. Gingrich, *Making Markets in the Welfare State: The Politics of Varying Market Reforms* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–3.

<sup>32</sup> Johannes Westberg and Esbjörn Larsson, 'Winning the War by Losing the Battle? The Marketization of the Expanding Preschool Sector in Sweden', *Journal of Education Policy* 37, no. 5 (2022): 705–22.

private actors created variation and diversity in the ever-evolving preschool sector. Consequently, as the number of private actors increased, the joint institutional-familial project of caring for and educating young children has become more complex. Parents were now tasked with choosing the institution with which to share this responsibility, making the choice of preschool a key parental responsibility.

Today, the distribution of private providers is not uniform across the country. Instead, specific areas have more established preschool markets than others, underscoring the importance of geographically contextualising the study of choice practices. Nationally, slightly over 20 percent of children are enrolled in privately run settings, with the majority attending municipally run preschools. In large cities and commuting municipalities near large cities, the percentage of children in private preschools is higher, exceeding 30 percent and 25 percent, respectively.<sup>33</sup> Certain municipalities stand out, like Täby within Stockholm county, where 93 percent of children attend privately run preschools. In many rural areas, there are no private options.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the diversity of available provision for families, especially regarding international preschools, depends on their geographic context and the nature of their specific preschool landscape. The distribution of preschools shapes a “landscape of choice”, where the options offered vary depending on one’s location.<sup>35</sup>

The aforementioned voucher system enables parents to choose freely between privately and publicly run preschools within their resident municipality without incurring cost differences. The application is usually submitted directly to the municipality, and parents are commonly requested to rank their preschool choices. When preschools are oversubscribed, municipal regulations come into play to allocate places. In many municipalities, the time spent on the waiting list becomes crucial in determining whether parents secure a spot at their favoured preschool.<sup>36</sup> Such local policies and practices exemplify how national policies, though universal in nature, can yield divergent consequences when implemented at the local level.<sup>37</sup>

Preschools cater to children aged one to five before transitioning to compulsory school. The educational level has firmly established itself as the primary step in

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<sup>33</sup> Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), ‘Barn och personal i förskola - hösten 2022’, *Beskrivande Statistik*, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Figures taken from open-source statistics. Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), ‘Sök statistik om förskola, skola och vuxenutbildning’, text, Sök statistik om förskola, skola och vuxenutbildning, 2021, <https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statistik/sok-statistik-om-forskola-skola-och-vuxenutbildning>.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Bowe, Stephen J. Ball, and Gewirtz, Sharon, “Parental Choice”, *Consumption and Social Theory: The Operation of Micro-Markets in Education*, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 42, no. 1 (1994): 38–52.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to this, there are a number of other priorities considered in the allocation of places, such as giving precedence to children with special education needs such as suggested in the Education Act. *Svensk författningssamling (SFS)*, ‘Skollag (2010:800)’ (2011) Moreover, those with siblings already attending the setting are often prioritised.

<sup>37</sup> Salla Fjällström, Kirsti Karila, and Maiju Paananen, ‘A Matter of Universalism? Rationalities of Access in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care’, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 6, no. 3 (2020): 207–18.

children's educational journeys, now seen as much more than solely a service for working parents.<sup>38</sup> The role of preschool as a key welfare institution is underscored by regulations ensuring equal access to high-quality education for all families. Preschools must admit children within the specified age range; they are not permitted to cater exclusively to one age group. Additionally, they must have operating hours that align with typical working hours to accommodate the needs of families. All preschools are obligated to follow the national curriculum and adhere to regulations concerning aspects such as safeguarding, their locale, and staff education.<sup>39</sup> However, preschools do have some room for manoeuvrability within these regulations. Preschools can have different staff organisation strategies, with some prioritising fewer but highly trained staff and others opting for more staff with less teacher training.<sup>40</sup> In the marketised landscape, such differences influence parents' choices. The varying characteristics of preschools, even if relatively small, are socially coded, with parents from different social classes assigning value to various features.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the cost of preschool is heavily subsidised. Parents contribute a small fee for their child's attendance, but the local municipality covers most of the cost through the voucher system. There are no price disparities between public and private providers, as a maximum fee system regulates both. This ensures that the maximum monthly fee paid by parents is 1,688 SEK (150 EUR).<sup>42</sup> Starting from the age of three, all children are eligible for 525 hours of fee-free provision per year.<sup>43</sup>

Although preschool is only a voluntary educational level, it is attended by the vast majority of children in the country. Approximately 85 percent of children between the ages of one and five attend, and this percentage increases with age, reaching 95 percent for five-year-old children.<sup>44</sup> Given the substantial participation of children in preschool and the extensive regulations that mitigate direct cost implications for parents in their preschool choices, Sweden serves as an appropriate context for studying the significance families place on choosing international preschools. Moreover, Sweden is home to a variety of international education options, both at the school and preschool levels.

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<sup>38</sup> Håkon Solbu Trætterberg et al., 'Quasi-Market Regulation in Early Childhood Education and Care: Does a Nordic Welfare Dimension Prevail?', *Nordic Studies in Education* 43, no. 1 (2023): 60–77.

<sup>39</sup> Svensk författningssamling (SFS), Skollag (2010:800).

<sup>40</sup> Håkan Forsberg, Jennifer Waddling, and Andreas Alm Fjellborg, 'Class-Based Preschool Enrolment - Social Stratification and Quality Differences in the Swedish Preschool Market', *Education Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (2024): 104–25.

<sup>41</sup> Carol Vincent and Stephen J. Ball, 'A Market in Love? Choosing Pre-School Childcare', *British Educational Research Journal* 27, no. 5 (2001): 633–51.

<sup>42</sup> This figure is for one child. Younger siblings have a reduced fee.

<sup>43</sup> Svensk författningssamling (SFS), Skollag (2010:800).

<sup>44</sup> Skolverket, 'Deltagande i förskola' (Skolverket, 2018).

## Forms of International Education in Sweden

Stockholm, the capital city of Sweden, takes centre stage in this study, being an area with a diverse range of international educational options. What can be termed as international schools can be divided into two categories: those that are part of the publicly funded system and those that charge fees.

In terms of policy, the term “international schools” exclusively refers to institutions that have received exemptions from certain aspects of the National Education Act.<sup>45</sup> These schools play a crucial role in Sweden’s strategy for attracting highly skilled temporary workers. Unlike other schools in the country, these international schools are not obligated to follow Sweden’s national curriculum, and they can conduct their teaching entirely in a foreign language, adhering to an international or another country’s curriculum. Notably, these schools are allowed to charge fees,<sup>46</sup> a practice prohibited in other educational institutions in Sweden.<sup>47</sup> Access to these international schools is restricted, not only due to their significant costs but also because of admission criteria. Families should either temporarily reside in Sweden, plan to leave Sweden, have previously educated their children abroad, or have a connection to the school’s language. This form of international school comprises just a fraction of the schools that call themselves international or are widely referred to as international.

The majority are bilingual and mostly independently run publicly funded institutions (“free-schools”) typically offering English alongside Swedish. These establishments are a product of the marketisation policies that swept the school sector in the 1990s. While adhering to the Swedish curriculum, they have the freedom to incorporate educational norms and practices inspired by international contexts. In terms of language, they are required to conduct at least fifty percent of the teaching in Swedish, which illustrates their divergent form of internationality in comparison to those fee-charging institutions. As these schools are anchored in the publicly funded school market, they are governed by Sweden’s educational laws that emphasise equal access for everyone. They must be available to all children, with no language proficiency requirements or fees for entry.<sup>48</sup> Despite this, their admission, like that of other independently run institutions, is determined by waiting lists. This shapes the conditions of access, and it is shown that schools of this type tend to exhibit an overrepresentation of children with highly educated parents. Moreover, they attract those with foreign backgrounds, typically not originating from English-speaking countries, and particularly those who are also highly educated.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, these forms of international education are

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<sup>45</sup> Svensk författningssamling (SFS), Skollag (2010:800).

<sup>46</sup> These schools are also partly funded by the municipality. Even when charging fees, they are allocated the same funds per (eligible) child as schools within the publicly funded system receive.

<sup>47</sup> However, if these schools are run by the municipality (which are particularly few in number), fees are not applicable.

<sup>48</sup> Svensk författningssamling (SFS), Skollag (2010:800).

<sup>49</sup> Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), ‘Undervisning på engelska. Utvärdering av en försöksverksamhet i grundskolan’, 2010.

demonstrated to be closely linked with social class. Additionally, it is evident that families from both Swedish and foreign backgrounds pursue this educational opportunity for their children.

In policy, the concept of an international or bilingual preschool is absent. However, parallels to the structures found at the school level can be identified within the preschool sector. There are preschools affiliated with fee-charging international institutions. These establishments, however, are not legally recognised as international preschools, nor are they considered preschools on a general level. Unlike international schools, these preschools do not receive financial support from the municipality and depend entirely on fees paid by parents. As they operate completely independent of public funding, they are not obligated to adhere to the Swedish preschool curriculum, allocation of spaces, or language-related policies. Instead, these preschools follow international curricula, exclusively use the English language, and admit children only during the later preschool years.<sup>50</sup>

The majority of preschools referred to as international preschools in this thesis share similarities with bilingual free-schools. While they may not be officially recognised as international or bilingual in policies, they actively project this identity. Typically operated by independent entities, these preschools emerged as a result of marketisation processes within the education sector, experiencing growth after the implementation of the right-to-establishment policy in the early 2000s. These preschools are fully integrated into the preschool sector and are obligated to comply with regulations outlined in the Education Act. Despite following the national preschool curriculum, they leverage the relatively flexible learning framework to tailor their offerings according to their interpretations, sometimes aligning with another country's or international curriculum. Additionally, although they are mandated to use the Swedish language due to the Language Act,<sup>51</sup> they do so bilingually. In Stockholm, the languages offered alongside Swedish include English, Estonian, French, German, Greek, Spanish, and Somali. Each preschool develops its unique international orientation through the composition of Swedish and non-Swedish pedagogical personnel, language usage, and the range of activities offered to attract families for enrolment.

Thus, as families seek preschool options for their children, they come across a diverse array of internationally orientated preschools, especially within specific geographic contexts. The social enrolment patterns of international preschools within this diverse preschool landscape remain unexplored. Given that most of these preschools operate within Sweden's highly subsidised preschool sector, the context becomes apt for studying international education for society's youngest children, as no economic barriers limit access to international education. Moreover, with the generally high rates of children attending preschool along with the particularities of education catering to such young children, the context provides a

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<sup>50</sup> This information is collected through conversations with staff at these preschools and corroborated by a discussion with a civil servant at the local board of education.

<sup>51</sup> Svensk författningssamling (SFS), 'Språklag (2009:600)' (2009).

situation where investments in international assets can be studied in the context of young children, a phase of childhood deeply associated with the realm of families.

## Aims and Research Questions

The aim of the thesis is to understand the relationship between international preschools and families. At the school level, the decision to pursue international education arises at the intersection of class-based practices and the possession and aspiration for internationally valued assets. Consequently, the choice of international education is framed as the interplay between socioeconomic status and the increasingly recognised value of specific transnational assets. Within the scope of this thesis, focusing on international preschools, parental decision-making practices are contextualised within a preschool landscape marked by class hierarchies and familial distinctions – the objective structures. Simultaneously, the thesis examines how families with different social, economic, and cultural resources navigate these objective structures concerning the upbringing of their young children, highlighting the significance that international preschools hold for particular families.

The study comprises four interrelated questions addressing these two perspectives:

- What characterises international preschools’ social recruitment when considering class hierarchies and social differences between all families in the preschool landscape of Stockholm?
- How does international preschool recruitment compare to that of preschools without international orientations? And how do their particular language offers relate to the social structures in this landscape?
- How do families with different social, economic, and cultural assets experience and navigate the social structures of the preschool landscape?
- In what ways do families negotiate between “national” and “international” considerations when selecting international preschools, and how do their class and migration backgrounds influence these decisions? What role do family dynamics, such as language composition, nationalities, and gender, play in shaping these choices?

## Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises nine chapters. The first four chapters outline the study. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two presents the previous research relevant to the study and ends by summarising the specific contribution of the thesis. In Chapter Three, the theoretical framework is outlined, and in Chapter Four, the methods, population, and materials are presented. Chapter Five is the

first empirical chapter. In this chapter, the spotlight is on social recruitment to international preschools, which reflects the outcomes of families' preschool choices. Through a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) of individual-level register data concerning all families encountering preschool in the Stockholm area in the years 2016–2020, this chapter demonstrates how the social characteristics, encapsulating social hierarchies and distinctions, of families with preschool children in the Stockholm area manifest into discernible social structures. Within this framework, international preschools' recruitment patterns are elucidated, with a particular exploration into the diverse language offerings of these institutions. The analysis draws upon data concerning all families with preschool children in the area between 2016 and 2020, leveraging individual-level register data as the primary source material.

In Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight, the primary focus lies on 36 interviews conducted with mothers, fathers, or both parents whose children are enrolled in international preschools. These families are predominantly middle-class. Throughout these chapters, the analysis explores parents' choice of international preschools in conjunction with their social class, national and international assets, and migration histories. Leveraging the findings from Chapter Five, these chapters contextualise the interviewees and their decisions within the framework of prevailing social hierarchies and distinctions observed among families.

Chapter Six studies how parents construct notions of “international” and “national” in relation to their identities, histories, and composition of social characteristics. These processes are shown to shape their encounters with the preschool landscape and influence their decision to opt for international preschool education for their children. The key themes addressed are the educational content of preschools and culture.

Chapter Seven focuses on language, framing the choice of international schools as a strategy employed by families to foster multilingualism in their children. This chapter elucidates how linguistic dynamics and opportunities shape families' interactions with the preschool landscape and inform their perceptions of the role played by international preschools within their families. Moreover, it underscores the intersection of language and social class, revealing how language investments correlate with their perceived value in national and international arenas.

Chapter Eight looks at migration histories. In this chapter, the analysis is based on those middle-class families who have relocated to Sweden facilitated by employment. Through an analysis of these families, the chapter delves into how migration influences family dynamics and the consequential effect on their decision-making process regarding the selection of international preschools. Finally, the thesis closes with a concluding chapter that synthesises and discusses the findings obtained throughout the study.



## CHAPTER 2

# Families, International Education, and Preschool

This chapter serves as an overview of the literature that encapsulates the various facets pertinent to this study. To begin, it provides a sociological exploration of educational practices on a general level, shedding light on the significance of social class in studies of educational choice. Subsequently, it delves into the specifics of international education and its social recruitment. Due to the limited research available on international preschools, this section draws predominantly on literature concerning international schools. This literature illustrates how class intersects with international education and that certain social groups, such as highly skilled migrant families, are often associated with choosing international schools. Acknowledging that this stream of research frequently overlooks the complexity of families, many of which are transnationalised, this thesis then introduces research on families' multilingualism, which is particularly pertinent when studying the parents of such young children. By incorporating this dimension, the thesis seeks to address the complexities inherent in family dynamics and the transnational nature that many families embody, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their choice of international preschools. The attention then shifts to family dynamics, parenting, and particularities of making educational choices in the preschool context, all themes pertinent to the study of these parents to young children. The chapter concludes by summarising how the study contributes to the existing streams of literature discussed.

## Educational Practices and Social Class

It is widely accepted that education functions as a tool for gaining social advantage, and a fundamental viewpoint in the sociology of education highlights that the education system serves as a mechanism for reproducing social hierarchies. Education, particularly the level of education attained, has long been recognised as an investment for economic gain, both on the individual and societal level.<sup>52</sup> Educational certification not only acts as a direct pathway to specific occupations, essential for maintaining social hierarchies, but the institutional cultures shaped by

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<sup>52</sup> Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

the characteristics of schools – the social recruitment – also play a critical role in perpetuating the social order.<sup>53</sup>

A glance towards the uppermost echelons of society, which are inclined to favour exclusive, fee-charging schools, presents a clear illustration of this phenomenon. These schools function as gatekeepers to power through the pathways they forge to positions in higher education and the labour market.<sup>54</sup> They attract families who already possess the economic, cultural, and social resources associated with elite groups, which the schools nurture and further through their distinct curricula and time-honoured rituals. Students accumulate social capital, and their identities are formed in these socially isolated environments. All of which imbue a sense of privilege and fortify their trajectories.<sup>55</sup> The exclusive nature of these schools, regarding their social recruitment and cultures, is pivotal to their position as elite schools. Even with the emergence of publicly-funded elite schools, resulting in a diminished influence of economic means on school accessibility, the fundamental processes remain observable.<sup>56</sup>

The use of education and specific educational institutions for perpetuating social privilege is shown to extend beyond the confines of elite circles. The entire educational landscape has been studied as a realm in which individuals, families, and groups strive to establish distinctions that restrict others' access to specific occupations, cultural practices, and life trajectories.<sup>57</sup> This process is said to have been intensified by academic inflation, the democratisation of education, and the implementation of neoliberal policies, which have given rise to the emergence of competitive educational quasi-markets.<sup>58</sup> Contemporary educational markets, such as that in Sweden, are characterised by a broad spectrum of schools, programmes, and specialisations, creating a situation where families' economic

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<sup>53</sup> Shamus Khan's ethnographic study illustrates how the interplay between elite social recruitment and school culture in St. Paul's School socialises pupils to embody privilege. Shamus Rahman Khan, *Privilege the Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 214–29.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. Joan Forbes and Bob Lingard, 'Assured Optimism in a Scottish Girls' School: Habitus and the (Re)Production of Global Privilege', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36, no. 1 (2015): 116–36; Adam Howard, *Learning Privilege Lessons of Power and Identity in Affluent Schooling* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Khan, *Privilege the Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*; Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton, 'The Reproduction of Privilege: Young Women, the Family and Private Education', *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 24, no. 2 (2014): 189–209.

<sup>56</sup> Howard, Adam, 'Enduring Privilege. Schooling and Elite Formation in the United States', *Zeitschrift Für Pädagogik* 65 (2019): 178–91.

<sup>57</sup> Agnes van Zanten, 'Elites, Privilege and Excellence: The National and Global Redefinition of Educational Advantage', in *World Yearbook of Education 2015* ed. Stephen Ball, Brigitte Darchy-Koechlin, and van Zanten, Agnes (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 13.

<sup>58</sup> Stephen J. Ball, Richard Bowe, and Sharon Gewirtz, 'Circuits of Schooling: A Sociological Exploration of Parental Choice of School in Social Class Contexts', *The Sociological Review* 43, no. 1 (1995): 52–78.

resources do not directly determine educational paths and experiences.<sup>59</sup> These markets, whilst facilitated through national policies, are localised in nature. Schools and families tend to have geographically limited encounters with school markets, resulting in the meanings attributed to different educational options being shaped within these socio-geographic contexts.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the local context emerges as paramount when it comes to studying how families navigate their children's educational paths.

The middle classes are often seen as the primary beneficiaries of these developments in publicly funded education. They leverage increased opportunities for choice and specialisation as a means to maintain their social positions and isolate themselves through selective educational decisions. Stephen Ball, in particular, emphasises the importance of examining how this group utilises education, asserting their significant role in perpetuating both longstanding and emerging social inequalities.<sup>61</sup> Interview studies with the middle class reveal the intricacies of their educational decision-making and underscore the significance they attach to making the correct choice, exhibiting ambivalence and worries about their responsibility to make the right choice.<sup>62</sup> Their narratives of encounters with educational landscapes evidence their belief in “good” and “bad” schools, with erroneous choices needing to be avoided. Navigating their educational options, evaluating schools, and constructing ideas of “good” schools is a multifaceted process characterised by complexity. The specialisations of schools are shown to be influential here; however, even when schools offer similar programs and pedagogies, their specific social and educational environments are scrutinised – a phenomenon not limited to the middle classes.<sup>63</sup>

“Good” schools are not just those with high academic performance or particular pedagogical offers. Instead, their social recruitment, the socio-economic status and ethnic diversity within the school's student body carry significant weight.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, it is argued that the notion of selecting in regards to the specialisation of pedagogical content obscures broader underlying processes; fam-

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas Koinzer, Rita Nikolai, and Florian Waldow, ‘Private Schooling and School Choice as Global Phenomena: An Introduction’, in *Private Schools and School Choice in Compulsory Education: Global Change and National Challenge*, ed. Thomas Koinzer, Rita Nikolai, and Florian Waldow (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2017), 1–6.

<sup>60</sup> Nihad Bunar, ‘Choosing for Quality or Inequality: Current Perspectives on the Implementation of School Choice Policy in Sweden’, *Journal of Education Policy* 25, no. 1 (2010): 1–18.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen J. Ball, *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003), 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ball, *Class Strategies and the Education Market*; Stephen J Ball and Carol Vincent, ‘“I Heard It on the Grapevine”: “hot” Knowledge and School Choice’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 19, no. 3 (1998): 377–400; Tanja Mayer et al., ‘A Parental School Choice Misery: Middle Class Parents’ Dilemma in Choosing a Primary School in Berlin’s Multi-Ethnic Neighborhoods’, *Journal of Pedagogy* 11, no. 1 (2020): 35–57.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Mayer et al., ‘A Parental School Choice Misery’.

<sup>64</sup> Maroussia Raveaud and Agnes Van Zanten, ‘Choosing the Local School: Middle Class Parents’ Values and Social and Ethnic Mix in London and Paris’, *Journal of Education Policy* 22, no. 1 (2007): 107–24; Agnes van Zanten, ‘Middle-Class Parents and Social Mix in French Urban Schools: Reproduction and Transformation of Class Relations in Education’, *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 13, no. 2 (2003): 107–24.

ilies navigate the educational market within the context of the cultural and ethnic hierarchies that permeate not only schooling and housing markets but also society as a whole.<sup>65</sup> Interrelated with these considerations is location, which influences how parents assess the suitability of schools for their children. Whether schools are situated in desirable or problematic areas offers insight into how parents associate socio-geographic aspects with educational institutions and evaluate their place within these geographic constructions of class.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the influence of schools' reputations within families' social circles is shown to be significant in parental decision-making, highlighting how processes of social isolation unfold within publicly funded educational markets. The so-called "hot knowledge" gathered from social networks, encompassing others' perceptions of schools, firsthand experiences, anecdotes, impressions, and encounters, has become a class-based source of information, supplementing or even supplanting the "cold knowledge" provided by schools and educational authorities, which often offer abstract information, evidence, and results.<sup>67</sup>

Although these studies offer valuable insights into families' choice practices and decision-making processes, they frequently operate under the presumption that school choice is solely attributed to mothers or is equally managed within the family unit. However, given that child-rearing typically involves two parents, each with a stake in the upbringing of their children, the dynamics of how they negotiate their beliefs regarding grapevine knowledge and perspectives on geographic areas and particular institutions remains somewhat underexplored in research.

In addition to research exploring families' subjective perceptions of schools, there also exists literature of a more normative nature that examines whether the educational choices made by the middle classes result in them receiving higher-quality education, as measured by attainment. One study conducted in the Swedish context suggests that middle-class students, defined by their parents' education and economic resources, who actively chose not to attend their local upper-secondary school, achieved slightly lower long-term educational outcomes compared to their peers who attended local schools.<sup>68</sup> The study concludes that the active choice-making of the middle classes, aimed at selecting "good" schools, is unsuccessful – a rather bold assertion given the challenges of establishing this pattern of choice and attainment as a causal relationship independent of other influential factors. There are several plausible explanations for their results, especially when considering the qualitative research revealing that families' choice processes are particularly complex

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<sup>65</sup> Nihad Bunar and Anna Ambrose, 'Schools, Choice and Reputation: Local School Markets and the Distribution of Symbolic Capital in Segregated Cities', *Research in Comparative and International Education* 11, no. 1 (2016): 34–51.

<sup>66</sup> Sylvain Broccolichi and Agnès van Zanten, 'School Competition and Pupil Flight in the Urban Periphery', *Journal of Education Policy* 15, no. 1 (2000): 51–60; Emma Rowe, 'Theorising *Geo-Identity* and David Harvey's Space: School Choices of the Geographically Bound Middle-Class', *Critical Studies in Education* 56, no. 3 (2015): 285–300.

<sup>67</sup> Ball and Vincent, "I Heard It on the Grapevine".

<sup>68</sup> Anders Trumberg and Susanne Urban, 'School Choice and Its Long-Term Impact on Social Mobility in Sweden', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 65, no. 4 (2021): 569–83.

and value-driven. Firstly, their results may reflect the complexity of evolving school markets, where, despite the efforts and resources invested in their decision-making processes, identifying educational quality indicators proves challenging.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the educational level may be influential, with upper-secondary school choice often being a negotiation between parents and their children – a dynamic frequently missing in school choice discussions.<sup>70</sup> Finally, it should be highlighted that middle-class perceptions of quality in schools do not solely equate to academic outcomes, such as the qualitative research highlighted. Instead, factors such as ethnicity and individual belief systems, such as religion, intersect with perceptions of quality, meaning the social environments and, in the case of upper-secondary schooling, specific tracks and trajectories drive choices.<sup>71</sup>

Having explored the interplay of school choice, educational differentiation, and social class at local and national levels, the focus of the chapter now transitions to include a global perspective and a specific form of education: international schools.

## Gatekeeping Internationality

Similar patterns of educational development, as outlined in the preceding section regarding the social structure of educational institutions and choices, are also evident in international education. International schools have evolved from a handful of exclusive institutions into an educational option for more diverse families. This expansion, both in terms of numbers and the variety of provision, has been spurred by the implementation of neo-liberal educational policies around the globe, which have widened access to international schools to those dependent on publicly funded education.<sup>72</sup> Thus, international schools are no longer limited to elite families but have emerged as educational pathways for families navigating local educational markets.

As a result, the very definition of what constitutes an “international school” is called into question on a global scale,<sup>73</sup> highlighting the impact of local and national educational developments on a global stage. The debates concerning the definition of international schools serve as arenas where the legitimacy of various forms of internationality and international schools are fiercely contested. Essentially, these

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<sup>69</sup> Sally Power, *Education and the Middle Class* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), 40–41.

<sup>70</sup> Lena Lidström, Ann-Sofie Holm, and Ulf Lundström, ‘Maximising Opportunity and Minimising Risk?: Young People’s Upper Secondary School Choices in Swedish Quasi-Markets’, *Young* 22, no. 1 (2014): 1–20.

<sup>71</sup> Afra Foli and Willem R. Boterman, ‘Cultural Repertoires of School Choice: Intersections of Class, Race and Culture in Pretoria and Amsterdam’, *The Sociological Review* 70, no. 6 (2022): 1220–39.

<sup>72</sup> Hayden and Thompson, ‘International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future’.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. Nicholas Brummit and Anna Keeling, ‘Charting the Growth of International Schools’, in *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years*, ed. Richard Pearce (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 25–36; Hayden, ‘Transnational Spaces of Education’; Hayden and Thompson, ‘International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future’.

discussions revolve around the gatekeeping of the recognition of and access to a progressively acknowledged avenue of social advantage – internationality.

A prime illustration of this phenomenon is the authority exerted by global edu-businesses<sup>74</sup> such as the International Schools Consultancy (ISC), whose definition of international schools holds substantial sway. The ISC, which proclaims its market expertise in international education, collects data concerning international schools worldwide and sells its analyses of future market niches. All of this is undertaken within the framework of their definition of international schools and now pre-schools, essentially privately operated institutions that provide international education with typically English language instruction. Their data not only holds sway within business spheres but has gained a degree of legitimacy in academic research, symbolically downgrading other forms of international education.<sup>75</sup> Academics' use of such data and limited definitions reveals their positions as stakeholders in these debates; many have backgrounds as practitioners in international schools and have actively contributed to the development of international curricula.<sup>76</sup>

While this relatively narrow definition of international schools dominates the discourse, broader definitions reveal a common thread suggesting that international schools are distinct from national schools and serve specific clientele.<sup>77</sup> However, this is as far as the similarities end, as discussions reveal the heterogeneity of these schools, portraying them as “thousands of existing institutions, each of which seems to define internationality through its own mutations”.<sup>78</sup> This heterogeneity suggests that while international schools may cater to families distinct from those in national schools, social recruitment diverges between institutions.

Diversity among international schools on a global scale is also related to the unique national contexts within which they operate. Nationally determined regulations and definitions significantly shape the forms of international schools

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<sup>74</sup> Education is posed to have become a Global Education Industry (GEI) in which education businesses work on an international level. Linda Rönnberg, 'From National Policy-Making to Global Edu-Business: Swedish Edu-Preneurs on the Move', *Journal of Education Policy* 32, no. 2 (4 March 2017): 234–49.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Tristan Bunnell, Michael Fertig, and Chris James, 'What Is International about International Schools? An Institutional Legitimacy Perspective', *Oxford Review of Education* 42, no. 4 (2016): 408–23; Martyna Elerian and Emiliou A Solomou, 'International or Internationalised? Exploring Issues Faced by International Schools in Local Markets: A Cyprus Case Study', *Journal of Research in International Education* 22, no. 1 (2023): 55–69; Alexander Gardner-McTaggart, 'International Schools: Leadership Reviewed', *Journal of Research in International Education* 17, no. 2 (2018): 148–63; Denry Machin, 'The Organisational Evolution of Contemporary International Schools', *Journal of Research in International Education* 18, no. 2 (2019): 109–24.

<sup>76</sup> Examples of this can be accessed in author biographies in the literature concerning international schools. E.g. Richard Pearce, ed., *International Education and Schools: Moving beyond the First 40 Years* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

<sup>77</sup> See Robert J. Leach, *International Schools and Their Role in the Field of International Education* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969).

<sup>78</sup> Niel Richards, 'Professional Development: An International Schools' Perspective', in *International Education in Practice: Dimensions for Schools and International Schools*, ed. Mary Hayden, Jeff Thompson, and George Walker (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 93.

operating in their contexts.<sup>79</sup> Intersecting this diversity are various posited typologies of international schools, which often categorise schools based on their purpose and organisational structure.<sup>80</sup> These classifications are also intertwined with schools' social recruitment, emphasising the influence of social class in shaping perceptions of the legitimacy of different forms of internationality. This influence extends not only to families through their choices but also to other stakeholders within the field.

The most dominating typology is posed by Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson, who distinguish three main categories of international schools: ideological, traditional, and non-traditional.<sup>81</sup> Ideological international schools, which are relatively rare, are said to be driven by the ideals of intercultural learning. These schools promote the aim of their institutions as alleviating world problems; they are a meeting place for a diverse cohort of children with different social backgrounds from across the world. Furthermore, through their pedagogical focus on nurturing intercultural aptitudes, children are said to develop global understanding and compassion.

Traditional international schools, on the other hand, are considered a response to the educational needs of affluent mobile groups. They typically use languages other than that of their host country,<sup>82</sup> follow international or foreign curricula, and charge tuition fees. Traditional international schools may also have stringent admissions criteria depending on the national context. These schools are typically depicted as the original and legitimate form of international education. Their privileged social recruitment serves as a defining characteristic of these schools. Illustrating the power of social class and distinction in gatekeeping internationality in the guise of legitimate needs. Lastly, non-traditional international schools are posed to be niche fillers established to meet demands for international education amongst domestic families. This form, driven by the implementation of educational marketisation, has predominantly fueled the proliferation of international schools worldwide.<sup>83</sup> The growth of non-traditional international schools is said to be centred in The Asia Pacific and the Middle East, which opens for worthy critique

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<sup>79</sup> E.g. Rania Sawalhi and Abdalnassir Tamimi, 'Leading Outstanding International Schools in Qatar: Lessons Learned', *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 22, no. 1 (2023): 60–72; Wenxi Wu and Aaron Koh, 'Being "International" Differently: A Comparative Study of Transnational Approaches to International Schooling in China', *Educational Review* 74, no. 1 (2022): 57–75.

<sup>80</sup> E.g. Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 'What Is International about International Schools?'; Leach, *International Schools and Their Role in the Field of International Education*; Hayden and Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'; Ronald Terwilliger, 'International Schools—Cultural Crossroads', *The Educational Forum* 36, no. 3 (1972): 359–63.

<sup>81</sup> Hayden and Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'.

<sup>82</sup> Host country here means the country of their location.

<sup>83</sup> Hayden and Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'.

that these typologies are Western-centric, which is further illustrated by the dominance of the English language in definitions of international schools.<sup>84</sup>

Values underlie this typology, with even the choice of terms revealing prevailing connotations. Traditional schools are placed in opposition to the more recent non-traditional international schools, which reflects the general idea that elite schools have long histories. Traditional schools are said to cater for families that have migrated (temporarily), whilst non-traditional schools serve those only aspiring for mobility. It is also suggested that non-traditional schools are primarily established for economic purposes, in contrast to traditional schools, which are argued to be motivated by different incentives. These categorisations imply a perceived distinction between a genuine necessity among already “international” families and a mere preference among non-international families. This illuminates the gatekeeping practices that perpetuate social advantages through international education on a global scale.

The typologies or categorisation of international school forms does not hold practical power over how schools choose to identify or market their provision. Some schools align with specific franchises, such as British International Schools, but there is no universally recognised certification scheme for the term international. Schools are free to use the term (if no national regulations exist), which intensifies debates in academic research. Tristan Bunnell, for example, proclaims that many schools lack “substance to support the claim” of being international, which seemingly equates to them not holding accreditation or offering particular forms of internationality. He suggests the establishment of such schools to be the emergence of a “non-premium sector”.<sup>85</sup> In a similar vein, despite seeking to critique dominant typologies, the creation of new terms for emerging contexts, such as Adam Poole’s use of the term “internationalised” to describe Chinese schools that offer the Chinese national curriculum while incorporating international features like bilingual provision,<sup>86</sup> can be perceived as perpetuating existing typologies and reinforcing the dominance of particular forms of and access to international assets.

These debates and academic works illustrate that international education is constantly evolving, operating in both national and global contexts. Within national spaces, international schools are recognised as distinct from other institutions within their national context. Therefore, to understand families’ choices of such institutions, the relevance of the local and national context becomes evident. The hierarchies of international schools and forms of internationality are dependent on the interplay between school provision and social

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<sup>84</sup> Adam Poole, ‘Decoupling Chinese Internationalised Schools from Normative Constructions of the International School’, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 50, no. 3 (2020): 447–54.

<sup>85</sup> Tristan Bunnell, ‘The Crypto-Growth of “International Schooling”: Emergent Issues and Implications’, *Educational Review* 74, no. 1 (2022): 48.

<sup>86</sup> Poole, ‘Decoupling Chinese Internationalised Schools from Normative Constructions of the International School’.



recruitment. The attention now shifts to focus on families and social groups that opt for international schools for their children.

## International Schools, Migrant and Domestic Families

The question of who chooses international education, for what reasons, and the process of this choice seems to have no single answer, which may be attributed to the variation in both what constitutes an international school and the local context. These institutions span from those charging substantial fees and possessing stringent admission criteria to publicly funded institutions open to all. As such, Hiroki Igarashi and Hiro Saito claim that there is not one social group responsible for the aforementioned increase in the establishment of international schools. Instead, they propose that complex social and geographic context-bound logics are at play.<sup>87</sup> Both factual and aspired migration have been associated with a tendency to opt for international education, illustrating the recognition of international educational experiences as valuable amongst both migrant and domestic groups. Frequently, such groupings structure the literature concerning international schooling; a typical point of departure is a specific mobile or local group.

## Conceptualisations of Mobile Social Classes

Affluent temporary migrants are associated with the emergence of early international schools and are said to continue to rely on such provision.<sup>88</sup> While elite mobile families are often regarded as the first to attend international schools, they were later followed by mobile middle-class groups who also gained access to fee-charging institutions. Two social classes relevant to understanding social recruitment to international schools and the significance these schools hold in international spheres and the lives of privileged migrant groups are the transnational capitalist class (TCC) and the global middle class (GMC).<sup>89</sup>

The TCC is a group proposed to steer global capitalism,<sup>90</sup> emerging as economic interests became globalised. Most commonly, the TCC is said to comprise professional executives of international companies.<sup>91</sup> However, Leslie Sklair suggests a broader definition that can be divided into four fractions: corporate –

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<sup>87</sup> Hiroki Igarashi and Hiro Saito, 'Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital: Exploring the Intersection of Globalization, Education and Stratification', *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 3 (2014): 222–39.

<sup>88</sup> Hayden and Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'.

<sup>89</sup> Note that this term has an alternative meaning used to describe the growing population of the world that is middle class, with particular reference to the rise of the middle classes in developing countries. Hagen Koo, 'The Global Middle Class: How Is It Made, What Does It Represent?', *Globalizations* 13, no. 4 (2016): 440–53.

<sup>90</sup> Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>91</sup> William K. Carroll, *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Zed, 2010), 1–7.

those running large transnational companies; state – politicians and bureaucrats; technical – professionals such as technicians and those in finance service; and consumerist – those related to consumption and marketing. Particular for this class is that, unlike other elite groups, they are said to be formed outside of nation-states, with their agendas not only linked to national spaces but focused towards international spheres or a plurality of nation-states.<sup>92</sup>

A level of scepticism exists regarding the formation of such a social class that is transnational in nature. The contention is that it is only their consolidation that occurs within international arenas, with their connections to nation-states being stronger than commonly suggested.<sup>93</sup> A geographic perspective is also pertinent. For instance, Val Burris and Clifford Staples doubt the evidence of a TCC on a global scale. Instead, they pose that if such a social class exists, it is confined to a particular region of the global economy, the North Atlantic region. Their study indicates that within this closely interlinked economic region, greater evidence emerges for the presence of a supranational class transcending national borders.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the notion of global can often be seen as equating to European and American dominance, which is also reflected within the curricula, educational culture, and languages of the international schools such groups are claimed to attend.

The GMC are posited to be closely intertwined with the TCC and also conceptualised as distinct from their domestic social counterparts.<sup>95</sup> Whilst the TCC is said to steer, the GMC facilitates through their highly trained professions.<sup>96</sup> Characteristics of this proposed class are that they are highly educated, work for international companies or organisations, are frequent cross-border movers, and often reside in global cities. They are conceived as working within a broad array of professions, albeit avoiding nationally bound professions, and frequently linked to the internationalised technology sector.<sup>97</sup> Like the TCC, the existence of a GMC is disputed.<sup>98</sup> However, there is little disagreement that there has been

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<sup>92</sup> Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class*.

<sup>93</sup> Carlos Gonzalez, 'Is the Locus of Class Development of the Transnational Capitalist Class Situated within Nation-States or in the Emergent Transnational Space?', *Global Networks-a Journal of Transnational Affairs* 19, no. 2 (2019): 261–79.

<sup>94</sup> Val Burris and Clifford L. Staples, 'In Search of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Alternative Methods for Comparing Director Interlocks within and between Nations and Regions', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 53, no. 4 (2012): 323–42.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. Stephen J. Ball and Dimitra Pavlina Nikita, 'The Global Middle Class and School Choice: A Cosmopolitan Sociology', *Zeitschrift Fur Erziehungswissenschaft* 17 (2014): 81–93; Miri Yemini, Claire Maxwell, and Ma'ayan Mizrahi, 'How Does Mobility Shape Parental Strategies - a Case of the Israeli Global Middle Class and Their "immobile" Peers in Tel Aviv', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 17, no. 3 (2019): 324–38.

<sup>96</sup> Miri Yemini and Claire Maxwell, 'De-Coupling or Remaining Closely Coupled to "Home": Educational Strategies around Identity-Making and Advantage of Israeli Global Middle-Class Families in London', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39, no. 7 (2018): 1032.

<sup>97</sup> See Ball and Nikita, 'The Global Middle Class and School Choice'.

<sup>98</sup> E.g. Jennifer Waddling, Emil Bertilsson, and Mikael Palme, 'Struggling with Capital: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Educational Strategies among Internationally Mobile Middle Class Families in Sweden', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 40, no. 5 (2019): 697–716.

an increase in the number of mobile professionals, from both middle-class groups and above, even if this is a modest growth.<sup>99</sup>

The study of highly skilled temporary migrants does not demand identifying if they belong to a specific class such as the TCC or GMC. For example, Anja Weiss discusses transnational upper classes, who are “spatially autonomous”, enabled through their economic resources as well as symbolic, in the sense of citizenship and educational and occupational pasts. Their ability to move is said to also equate to an ability to stay; with ease, they can choose to reside where they deem advantageous, unlike other more precarious migrant groups.<sup>100</sup> Regarding the middle-class strata, some researchers conceptualise them as highly skilled migrants and professional migrants, rather than a GMC. However, despite the different terminology, divisions, and conceptualisation of certain groups and classes, their empirical findings can be understood together, which is especially useful as the borders of social classes can be challenging to demarcate.

### Mobile Families, Educational Choice and Parenting Practices

In response to the growth of highly skilled migration, groups such as the TCC, GMC, and transnational upper classes have become of greater academic interest. A stream of researchers has turned their focus to these groups’ practices, identity, and, more recently, education. The educational strategies of these groups are argued to be somewhat of a lacuna, which has led to a recent call for arms to address this.<sup>101</sup>

A study in the Swedish context has explored the enrolment patterns of highly skilled migrant families’ children in international and non-international schools.<sup>102</sup> Taking the notion of the TCC and GMC as a point of departure for categorising highly skilled immigrant groups, the study divides these groups into top executives, upper middle class, and middle class. It compares their enrolment at international schools (defined by national policy as international schools), national schools with bilingual profiles, and national schools without bilingual profiles.<sup>103</sup> The results indicate class-based practices, wherein the most economically endowed families (top executives) sent their children to international schools to a greater extent than migrant upper middle and middle classes. Middle-class migrants were found to attend national schools without an international orientation more often than attending either form of international school. Whether this was the result of a lack of international options in the educational market or, instead, a preference for a

<sup>99</sup> E.g. Jonathan V. Beaverstock, ‘Transnational Elites in the City: British Highly-Skilled Inter-Company Transferees in New York City’s Financial District’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 2 (2005): 245–68; Sam Scott, ‘The Social Morphology of Skilled Migration: The Case of the British Middle Class in Paris’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 7 (2006): 1105–29.

<sup>100</sup> Anja Weiss, ‘The Transnationalization of Social Inequality: Conceptualizing Social Positions on a World Scale’, *Current Sociology* 53, no. 4 (2005): 714.

<sup>101</sup> Claire Maxwell et al., ‘The Plurality of the Global Middle Class(Es) and Their School Choices - Moving the “field” Forward Empirically and Theoretically’, *Discourse* 40, no. 5 (2019): 609–15.

<sup>102</sup> Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme, ‘Struggling with Capital’.

<sup>103</sup> Which in the introduction of this thesis are categorised as being a form of international school.

national educational experience is unclear. The study also illustrates that internationally oriented educational choices are not only structured by vertical class structures. When breaking down the upper-middle and middle classes into economic and cultural fractions, a new pattern emerged, indicating that the economic fraction had a greater reliance on international schools than the cultural fraction. Thus, certain forms of internationality are more closely associated with the economic fractions than the cultural fractions, stretching through the class hierarchy (albeit in the middle and upper-middle classes).<sup>104</sup>

While this study explored and compared multiple social categories of highly skilled immigrants, it bases its analysis on foreign-born families. This approach overlooks individuals who may be returning home temporarily or permanently and excludes families with parents of different national backgrounds, a group that could offer valuable insights into how internationality is negotiated in families regarding their educational choices for their children.

Megan Adams and Joseph Agbenyega suggest that the choice of international schools by mobile families can be understood from various perspectives. One aspect is that parents perceive a benefit in educating their children away from their national system as it allows them to opt out of the dominant pedagogy and structures of education, such as school starting age, in their home countries.<sup>105</sup> This finding resonates with studies conducted on mobile professionals in Europe, which have demonstrated a belief that mobility represents a form of emancipation from certain aspects of national systems and provides the possibility to invest in other countries or international spheres.<sup>106</sup> This emancipation pertains to the middle classes, who are blocked by the hierarchies present in national systems. In their home countries, economic factors may prevent the middle classes from accessing elite institutions, leading them to enrol in state-funded options. However, their highly skilled professional mobility provides them with access to more symbolically valued institutions in other national spaces. In this perspective, international schooling becomes a privileged choice and evidence of the sense of precariousness felt by the middle classes. Following an international route can be deemed to better their social position both in their home countries and allow them to continue on international pathways and reproduce the social advantage families have acquired through mobility.<sup>107</sup>

Despite this notion that mobility allows families to avoid certain aspects of the home nation and education, it is shown that the temporality of their migration

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<sup>104</sup> Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme, 'Struggling with Capital'.

<sup>105</sup> Megan Adams and Joseph Agbenyega, 'Futurescapes: School Choice of Internationally Mobile Global Middle Class Families Temporarily Residing in Malaysia', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 40, no. 5 (2019): 655–58.

<sup>106</sup> E.g. Alberta Andreotti, Patrick Le Galès, and Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes, 'Transnational Mobility and Rootedness: The Upper Middle Classes in European Cities', *Global Networks* 13, no. 1 (2013): 41–59; Adrian. Favell, *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe* (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2008), 1–14.

<sup>107</sup> Jason Beech et al., "'Cosmopolitan Start-up' Capital: Mobility and School Choices of Global Middle Class Parents', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 51, no. 4 (2021): 527–41.

necessitates continued investments in their countries of origin. This belief has emotional and pragmatic aspects that extend into their educational choices, parenting practices, and decisions for further mobility, with perceptions concerning good choices and trajectories for their children being integral.<sup>108</sup> For these middle classes who leave secure positions in their home nations, maintaining links and avenues back home is a typical practice, termed by Miri Yemini and colleagues as “mobile nationalism”<sup>109</sup> Language is particularly salient here, with globally mobile professionals said to recognise the value of their native language both for facilitating homeward mobility and for preserving identity. However, these families also aim for their children to master a global language, typically English and sometimes Mandarin, often achieved through international schooling abroad.<sup>110</sup> A conclusion drawn from this is that educational practices, such as school choice, are intertwined with parenting practices, both shaped by the ongoing pressures for success in both national and international spaces. However, once again, the research tends to focus on particular national groups or families whose parents have the same national backgrounds, leaving a gap in understanding how parenting and associated educational practices are influenced when families are transnational in nature.

So far, the choice of international schools by highly mobile middle-class migrants has been framed as associated with their social advantage. Another perspective worth considering is the potential disadvantages these individuals may face in national settings, which should also be acknowledged despite their advantages often overshadowing these challenges. One consequence of residing in foreign nations can be a limited depth of knowledge about schools in both their new national context and their home country if returning, a knowledge that the domestic middle class has typically acquired.<sup>111</sup> As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the middle classes leverage a wealth of resources and knowledge to navigate educational markets. Thus, for those lacking the ability to navigate the school system to the level they wish, turning to international schools can be a strategy to avoid “bad” schools, which gives their choices the impression of being compensatory.<sup>112</sup>

Moreover, even if parents believe they have sufficient knowledge to identify good schools, their children’s previous international educational experiences can be seen as problematic. They are forced to consider whether their children will be at a cultural and linguistic disadvantage compared to their domestically educated peers. For those who are deemed to have missed out on common cultural references and have deprioritised their mother tongues (typically replaced by English), interna-

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<sup>108</sup> Louise Ryan and Rosemary Sales, ‘Family Migration: The Role of Children and Education in Family Decision-Making Strategies of Polish Migrants in London’, *International Migration* 51, no. 2 (2013): 90–103.

<sup>109</sup> Miri Yemini et al., ‘Mobile Nationalism: Parenting and Articulations of Belonging among Globally Mobile Professionals’, *Sociology* 54, no. 6 (2020): 1212–29.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme, ‘Struggling with Capital’.

<sup>112</sup> Johanna Waters, ‘“Roundabout Routes and Sanctuary Schools”: The Role of Situated Educational Practices and Habitus in the Creation of Transnational Professionals’, *Global Networks* 7, no. 4 (2007): 482.

tional schools become a way to turn this handicap into a continued investment in international spaces.<sup>113</sup> In this sense, international schools can enable them to bypass the possible disadvantages they have accrued through their cross-border mobility but simultaneously perpetuate their separation from their national context.

In the context of potential social disadvantage, social networks serve as significant resources for maintaining social positions, particularly as migrant families navigate new environments.<sup>114</sup> As these families establish themselves in foreign countries, they often need to develop new social networks. In this context, international schools become instrumental tools for forging connections, even though the decision to choose such schools is rarely perceived as a compensatory practice, neither by researchers nor the families themselves. For instance, in Jonathan Beaverstock's study of highly skilled British professionals in New York, having children who attended international schools was found to facilitate families in building ties with others from their country of origin.<sup>115</sup> This underscores the broader impact of international schools beyond the lives of children alone, particularly for non-working mothers, as their children's attendance at these schools provided a platform for establishing social networks with other mothers in similar situations.<sup>116</sup> A similar scenario is depicted in Sam Scott's study on a mobile British middle class in Paris, where social lives revolved around the connections forged at their children's school, a phenomenon he terms "school-gate sociability".<sup>117</sup> While these international schools facilitate the mobility of these groups, they also socially isolate them, separating them from national cultures and norms and limiting their potential for more rooted national educational experiences.

A final relevant theme concerning internationally mobile families and international schools pertains to the process of families choosing between international schools. Despite the proclaimed wide variation of institutions, this is a lacuna in research, as studies tend to focus simply on the dichotomy of international and non-international schools, categories of international schools, or studying individual institutions. There are, however, a few studies that begin to address these questions. For example, Georg Breidenstein and colleagues analysed internet forums in which soon-to-be-arriving families sought advice about Berlin's various international school choices.<sup>118</sup> While they were not able to fully relate the forum discussions to social backgrounds or class structures, their study does suggest that in contexts where families have various options for international

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<sup>113</sup> Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme, 'Struggling with Capital', 708.

<sup>114</sup> Jonathan V Beaverstock, 'Transnational Elites in Global Cities: British Expatriates in Singapore's Financial District', *Geoforum* 33, no. 4 (2002): 533–34.

<sup>115</sup> Beaverstock, 'Transnational Elites in the City', 262.

<sup>116</sup> Beaverstock, 'Transnational Elites in the City'.

<sup>117</sup> Scott, 'The Social Morphology of Skilled Migration', 1116, 1118.

<sup>118</sup> Georg Breidenstein et al., 'Choosing International: A Case Study of Globally Mobile Parents', in *Elite Education and Internationalisation: From the Early Years to Higher Education*, ed. Claire Maxwell et al., 2018, 161–80; Martin Forsey et al., 'Ethnography at a Distance: Globally Mobile Parents Choosing International Schools', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 28, no. 9 (2015): 1112–28.

schools, the particular forms of internationality offered by the institutions, such as their alignment with particular national contexts or the clientele they are said to serve, are influential in how families assess their options.

A further study that addresses how families navigate attributes of international schools is that of Peter Mackenzie and colleagues, who compared parental priorities when selecting international schools. They found a relationship between families' nationalities and the aspects they prioritise, concluding that the valuation of forms of internationality is place-bound. For example, parents from Anglophone countries focused less on the "international" aspect of international schooling than Europeans, presumably as it often equates to American or British education. At the same time, however, this group prioritised English language education more than others.<sup>119</sup> A possible deduction here is that for those already possessing this globally recognised asset, its potential weakening is deemed highly detrimental.

### Local Families Making International Choices

While mobile families, referencing these privileged migrant groups, are most commonly perceived as managing their lives in international spheres (even while constantly negotiating their investments in their home countries), domestic families are often portrayed as aspiring for mobility. China, purportedly the primary catalyst behind the expansion of international schools, driven by the demand among Chinese families for elite English-speaking education, emerges as the focal point for much of the research on domestic international schooling.<sup>120</sup> The "new rich" are said to be the predominant group enrolling at international schools in this context.<sup>121</sup> However, the sociological logic underlying this inclination is contended. On the one hand, it is suggested that this group's use of international schools can be attributed to their national successes, which have provided them with the resources needed to invest in international spheres. They are seen as simultaneously investing in international and national attributes through their "cosmopolitan-nationalism", which is achieved in Chinese bilingual international schools where cultural sensibilities are protected whilst nurturing internationality.<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, a different perspective on China's new rich implies that this group's inclination towards international schools stems from their precarious

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<sup>119</sup> Peter Mackenzie, Mary Hayden, and Jeff Thompson, 'Parental Priorities in the Selection of International Schools', *Oxford Review of Education* 29, no. 3 (2003): 299–314.

<sup>120</sup> Tristan Bunnell, *International Schooling and Education in the 'New Era': Emerging Issues*, First edition, Emerald Points (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing, 2019), 55–84.

<sup>121</sup> Ewan Wright, Ying Ma, and Euan Auld, 'Experiments in Being Global: The Cosmopolitan Nationalism of International Schooling in China', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 20, no. 2 (2021): 236–49; Natalie Young, 'Departing from the Beaten Path: International Schools in China as a Response to Discrimination and Academic Failure in the Chinese Educational System', *Comparative Education* 54, no. 2 (2018): 159–80.

<sup>122</sup> Wright, Ma, and Auld, 'Experiments in Being Global'. This concept bears similarities to Yemini and colleagues' concept of mobile nationalism, albeit with the key difference that these locally-rooted families are acquiring cosmopolitan attitudes rather than partaking in factual cross-border mobility; Yemini et al., 'Mobile Nationalism'.

social status. Despite their economic affluence, these individuals, primarily characterised by their entrepreneurial pursuits, find themselves in unstable social positions. As a result, they turn to international schools as a means to circumvent mainstream education and the nationally rooted hierarchies in which the broader middle classes maintain an advantage.<sup>123</sup> This perspective indicates that the choice of international schools is shaped by localised educational markets and altering forms of nationally rooted middle-class cultures.

The relevance of evolving localised educational markets is highlighted in several studies concerning international schools. For instance, in the Indian context, David Sancho attributes local families' enrolment at new forms of international schools to the changing educational markets and the growing middle class. He poses that these families are not necessarily preparing their children for international futures, but rather that forms of internationality are an established part of middle-class culture, and these international schools provide education and a social environment that weaves together other forms of middle-class culture with internationalised aspects.<sup>124</sup> In educational markets around the world, there is evidence that "international" has become a symbol of quality and "good schools".<sup>125</sup> This implies that international schools, at least in certain forms, are an option considered by a broad range of families who navigate between both international and more typical educational provision.

### Nuances in Dichotomy

The dichotomy of domestic and migrant families, or mobile and local groups, tends to shadow the temporal nature of family mobility and the fact that these categories are not necessarily rigid. Some point to the notion that mobile families continuously cross national borders for their work.<sup>126</sup> However, the realities of this kind of category are called into question when findings, such as that of Louise Ryan and Jon Mulholland, show that mobility plans are frequently uncertain; temporary plans can become long-term and families that could be defined as mobile are not always making definitive plans about the temporality of their stays. Instead, they tend to develop as a result of the mixture of both occupational and family experiences.<sup>127</sup> For this reason, they pose a fitting term for understanding highly skilled

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<sup>123</sup> Young, 'Departing from the Beaten Path', 174.

<sup>124</sup> David Sancho, "Keeping up with the Time": Rebranding Education and Class Formation in Globalising India', *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 14, no. 4 (2016): 477–91.

<sup>125</sup> E.g. Hamdah Abdullah Alfaraidy, 'Factors Influencing Saudi Parents' Choice of International Schools in Saudi Arabia', *Journal of Research in International Education* 19, no. 3 (2020): 220–32; Joel Windle and Quentin Maire, 'Beyond the Global City: A Comparative Analysis of Cosmopolitanism in Middle-Class Educational Strategies in Australia and Brazil', *Discourse* 40, no. 5 (2019): 717–33.

<sup>126</sup> Yemini et al., 'Mobile Nationalism'.

<sup>127</sup> Louise Ryan and Jon Mulholland, 'Trading Places: French Highly Skilled Migrants Negotiating Mobility and Emplacement in London', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 598.



occupational mobility as being a “continuum of emplacement”.<sup>128</sup> This does not, however, demote the importance of studying certain groups as being characterised, or not, by mobility. Instead, it suggests that both migration histories and plans for mobility are intrinsic to a holistic understanding of families’ present status.

One study that exhibits how domestic families could also be considered globally mobile is that of Don Weenink, who studies the parents of Dutch children in international streams in The Netherlands. Through interviews, he identified that the parents of these children, whilst residing in their home country, had partaken in various forms of international mobility. He coins two analytical categories for families: “dedicated cosmopolitans” and “pragmatic cosmopolitans”, with the first linked to ideological values of open-mindedness and interacting outside of national borders and the latter concerned with rational investments in the international for education or career success, both outside and within national borders.<sup>129</sup> Identifying two such logics illustrates the pressures for internationality from both within the national context and through international experiences that are neither factual nor aspired but temporal.

### The Particularities of Preschool

When it comes to young children, there is limited research concerning international preschools and their association with migrant and domestic families. Several factors may contribute to this scarcity. Firstly, whilst the recognition of preschool as an educational level is growing around the world, its significance for children’s outcomes is relatively unclear. Older preschool children have been absorbed into some international schools, and international curricula have been developed for them, but there seems to be little interest in expanding provision to cater to the youngest age range and their particular needs. Another contributing factor may be the dynamics of highly skilled migration. Given that international education is often associated with mobile families, where migration often revolves around fathers’ employment, it may leave mothers with the opportunity to stay at home with their young children.<sup>130</sup> However, as shown, international provision takes many forms. By broadening the definition of international to encompass institutions that may not explicitly perceive or promote themselves as such, one finds a number of bilingual preschools that reflect forms of internationality in the literature concerning international schools.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Don Weenink, ‘Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital: Parents Preparing Their Children for a Globalizing World’, *Sociology* 42, no. 6 (2008): 1089–1106.

<sup>130</sup> Anne-Meike Fechter, ‘Gender, Empire, Global Capitalism: Colonial and Corporate Expatriate Wives’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 8 (2010): 1279–97.

<sup>131</sup> Johanna Mierendorff, Thilo Ernst, and Marius Mader, ‘Embedded Internationalisation and Privilege in German Early Years Provision’, in *Elite Education and Internationalisation: From the Early Years to Higher Education*, ed. Claire Maxwell et al., 2018, 121–38.

Bilingual preschools have been studied, albeit limitedly, regarding their social recruitment. Many of these studies examine language immersion preschools, where minority languages (official or non-official) are offered alongside the country's dominant language.<sup>132</sup> For example, English and Spanish preschools are available in specific areas of America, catering primarily to Spanish-speaking minorities as a form of compensatory provision.<sup>133</sup> Bilingual preschools that offer the nation's dominant national language (or one of them) and English as an additional language are becoming increasingly common across Europe (and the world).<sup>134</sup> Who attends them varies depending on the conditions of each national context. Unlike preschools that offer minority languages, such bilingual institutions are not considered compensatory educational practices but offer elite additive bilingualism.<sup>135</sup>

Jürgen Gerhards and colleagues conducted a rather extensive study on preschools in Germany with such bilingual profiles. They compared children who attended these programs to those who did not, explicitly concentrating on children with German backgrounds and excluding those with foreign backgrounds from their analysis.<sup>136</sup> Their study revealed that families with higher economic and educational assets are overrepresented in these bilingual preschools. They propose that this trend can be explained by the fact that middle-class parents emphasise the value of early childhood education and language acquisition at a young age, considering it a more integral part of their children's educational paths compared to other groups. Furthermore, given the extra costs associated with these specialised preschools, the higher economic resources of these families make them more accessible.<sup>137</sup>

It is not only in the German context that this type of English-speaking bilingual preschool is characterised by high fees. In Switzerland, for instance, such preschools are not subsidised by the state and instead charge high fees that limit enrolment to economically affluent families.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, these preschools are regarded as elite institutions in Serbia due to their cost.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, in an article concerning the Chinese context, this type of preschool is termed elite international kindergartens,

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<sup>132</sup> E.g. Olga Maia Amaral, 'Parents' Decisions about Bilingual Program Models', *Bilingual Research Journal* 25, no. 1–2 (2001): 215–37; Maire Mhic Mhathuna and Fiona Nic Fhionnlaoich, 'Why Parents Chose to Send Their Children to Irish-Medium Immersion Preschools: Learning from Parental Choice Strategies in Celtic Countries', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 29, no. 3 (2021): 441–54.

<sup>133</sup> E.g. Amaral, 'Parents' Decisions about Bilingual Program Models'.

<sup>134</sup> Mierendorff, Ernst, and Mader, 'Embedded Internationalisation and Privilege in German Early Years Provision'; Koh and Ziqi, "'Start-up' Capital'.

<sup>135</sup> Anne-Marie de Mejía, *Power, Prestige and Bilingualism: International Perspectives on Elite Bilingual Education* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2002), 39–43.

<sup>136</sup> Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson, *Social Class and Transnational Human Capital*, 124–27.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Anna Becker-Cavallin and Alex Knoll, 'Establishing Multiple Languages in Early Childhood. Heritage Languages and Language Hierarchies in German-English Daycare Centers in Switzerland.', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 25, no. 7 (2022): 2561–72.

<sup>139</sup> Danijela Prošić-Santovac and Danijela Radović, 'Children's vs. Teachers' and Parents' Agency: A Case of a Serbian-English Bilingual Preschool Model', *Language, Culture, and Curriculum* 31, no. 3 (2018): 289–302.

and they are posited as a pathway towards elite international schools.<sup>140</sup> This pattern underscores a trend among these relatively newly established preschools, wherein in contexts where these institutions impose higher fees, access to this form of international education primarily becomes available to families possessing the economic means necessary to meet the associated expenses. As a result, access to international assets at a young age becomes stratified along socio-economic lines.

Thus, the limited literature regarding international preschools largely parallels that of international schools, where internationality frequently aligns with perpetuating social advantage, albeit through potentially novel avenues. However, akin to the existing literature on international schools, research on international preschools often focuses on specific groups of individuals and families where parents share the same national background. Throughout much of this literature, language plays a central role in parents' decisions to enrol their children in international schools and preschools. Nevertheless, conspicuously absent from these studies is an examination of the significance of language within multilingual families.

## Interlingual Families and Language Practices

The literature on cross-border mobility, family life, and international education has generally centred on families where the children's parents share the same linguistic background. Alternatively, it has often overlooked the significance of familial multilingualism. An outcome of heightened migration is the rise in interlingual families who, upon having children, encounter the dilemma and journey of raising their offspring bilingually or even multilingually. Furthermore, even within monolingual families, cross-border mobility often entails raising children within new linguistic environments, potentially leading to their children's multilingualism. A stream of research explores linguistically diverse families. Whilst this literature may not typically focus on international education, comprehending linguistic structures emerges as paramount in shedding light on how families raise a child in interlingual contexts. Moreover, this literature holds the potential to enhance the understanding of families' choices and use of international preschools.

The terminology surrounding interlingual families is relatively diverse, as is what defines bilingual or multilingualism. Adding to the complexity is whether the linguistic context surrounding the family unit, i.e. the dominant languages in their country of residence, are included when attempting to grasp the linguistic situation of parents and their children. Masayo Yamamoto poses a taxonomy based on Japanese-English-speaking families residing in Japan to capture the diversity of bilingual families.<sup>141</sup> The taxonomy takes into consideration the parents' native languages as well as the community language, which refers to the dominant language

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<sup>140</sup> Koh and Ziqi, "Start-up" Capital.

<sup>141</sup> Masayo Yamamoto, *Language Use in Interlingual Families: A Japanese-English Sociolinguistic Study* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001), 37–43.

of the country they reside (Japanese in her study). “Cross-native/community language families”, it is suggested, comprise parents who speak different languages to one another, and one of these languages is the native language of their country of residence. Transposing this to a Swedish context, a family belonging to this group would comprise one native Swedish parent and one with another native language. In “Cross-native/non-community language families”, parents have different native languages, neither that of their country of residence. “Shared-native/community language families” comprise parents who share the same native language, which is also the national language of the country in which they reside. They also use at least one other language to communicate with their family. An example of this group could be a family of two Swedish-born parents, with at least one of them growing up with another family language. The final group, “shared-native/non-community language families”, are those in which parents share the same native language, but this language is not the same as the dominant language in their country of residence. These families are interlingual as they are surrounded by another language in their daily lives.<sup>142</sup>

Such a taxonomy enables one to grasp the realities of bilingual family life if it is understood in relation to the notion that languages can be sources of power in society and within families and partnerships.<sup>143</sup> A plausible deduction here is that in families where only one parent’s native language is the community language, the opportunities and limitations these parents face in this linguistic context diverge and can shape the organisation and practices of family life. However, the taxonomy fails to grasp the entire complexity of families’ linguistic abilities, as parents who do not have the same native language as the community language may have become fluent. This factor applies to all the languages and categories in question; even parents who do not share the same native language may well be fluent in each other’s native language.

Yamamoto touches on the possibilities of bilingual parents in one of the categories but not in the others. For those belonging to the last group, shared-native/non-community language families, one may find that parents sharing a native language have a further native language they do not share if one parent was raised in a bilingual context. This becomes relevant when studying the contemporary rearing practices of young children; languages have symbolic worth in today’s world, and thus, even if these shared native language parents may communicate with one another in their shared language, the bilingual parent (or even parents) may opt to communicate in their other language to pass on this asset, adding new levels of linguistic diversity into their family life.

Bilingualism has been a child developmental question that has undergone a complete reversal in regard to expert advice. Some decades ago, dominating ad-

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> For instance, Ingrid Piller, *Bilingual Couples Talk: The Discursive Construction of Hybridity* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 125–26 illustrates how the requirement for individuals fluent in the dominant language of a country to act as translators for their partners can establish a power dynamic.

vice suggested that children raised in multilingual families should be limited to only one home language to avoid developmental delay. This advice has now been discredited, and raising a child bilingually in interlingual families is advocated.<sup>144</sup> Several more recent studies have pointed towards the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of children's bilingualism. In a comparison of children with immigrant backgrounds raised in America, for example, it is shown that those with developed bilingualism fare better in the early stages of their careers than those who grow up speaking predominantly English. These bilingual children are shown to gain higher incomes even when such aspects as cognitive ability and social background are controlled for, which is argued as evidence that minority languages provide a social advantage.<sup>145</sup>

With the evolving understanding of children's bilingual development, bilingualism is increasingly recognised as a valuable asset, regardless of the second language involved. For interlingual families, bilingualism has become integral to their parenting practices. In these families, the ability to offer children more than one home language is often seen as a marker of good parenting.<sup>146</sup> In this context, a moral dimension exists within their parenting practices; the failure to raise a bilingual child may be perceived as a shortcoming in their parenting. Following dominating expert advice concerning the most effective method of transmitting their languages, a typical linguistic family organisation is the "one-parent, one-language" approach (OPOL), where each parent communicates with their child in their native language. However, inherent in this practice is the idea that children are passive recipients of their family's linguistic structure or language policies.<sup>147</sup> While parents may initially establish language practices, it is argued that children play a significant role in shaping how these practices evolve. Children's developing linguistic abilities, language preferences, and their strengths and weaknesses in language mastery all shape the language practices within their household.<sup>148</sup>

Children's influence in shaping language practices within the family exemplifies one of the challenges encountered by interlingual families in their parenting journeys. Additionally, the process of raising bilingual children is fraught with ambivalence, driven by concerns about its impact on family communication, anxieties regarding linguistic development, and the considerable time and effort it

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<sup>144</sup> See Susanne Döpke, *One Parent, One Language: An Interactional Approach* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1992); Colin Baker, *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* (Clevedon; Multilingual Matters, 2007).

<sup>145</sup> Orhan Agirdag, 'The Long-Term Effects of Bilingualism on Children of Immigration: Student Bilingualism and Future Earnings', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 17, no. 4 (2014): 449–64.

<sup>146</sup> Ingrid Piller and Livia Gerber, 'Family Language Policy between the Bilingual Advantage and the Monolingual Mindset', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 24, no. 5 (2021): 622–35.

<sup>147</sup> E.g. Kendall A. King, Lyn Fogle, and Aubrey Logan-Terry, 'Family Language Policy', *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2, no. 5 (2008): 907–22.

<sup>148</sup> Piller, *Bilingual Couples Talk*, 261–63.

demands.<sup>149</sup> Regarding the latter, parents frequently justify their dedication within the broader scope of parenting ideals. Interlingual families commonly believe that effective parenting involves sacrificing time and effort to ensure the best future for their children, reinforced by comparing themselves to others who do not prioritise bilingualism. By contrasting themselves with these families, they affirm their commitment to bilingual parenting, considering it a crucial element of effective parenting. Thus, their devotion becomes emblematic of effective parenting, signifying their belief that they are nurturing their children optimally, even at the expense of convenience.<sup>150</sup>

The OPOL approach to bilingualism can be understood within the context of gendered roles in families, particularly in relation to notions of parenting and mothering. This perspective is elucidated by findings from two studies conducted in Anglophone countries. The first study, conducted by Toshie Okita, focuses on families where fathers are English speakers and mothers speak their native language. It was found that mothers predominantly bore the burden of worries regarding their children's bilingualism, whether these concerns were based on factual evidence or imagined scenarios. The children's proficiency in English, the language spoken by the father and predominant in the community, was a central concern for mothers in the study. This worry stemmed from children spending more time with their mothers, who often had fewer employment opportunities. As a result, the mother's native language had a more substantial influence on the children's linguistic development, potentially overshadowing their acquisition of English, leading to heightened apprehensions among mothers about their children's proficiency in English.<sup>151</sup> Notably, educational institutions were not included in this study due to the age of the children involved, which highlights the significance of the early years in children's linguistic development. Furthermore, the study had limited emphasis on the negotiations of languages within the family dynamic and the symbolic value attributed to each language.

In the second study, in the Australian context, Ingrid Piller and Livia Gerber, highlight that mothers who were English speakers, sharing the dominant language of their country of residence, felt a sense of responsibility regarding their children's acquisition of their father's native language. Despite not being the parents responsible for speaking the second family language, these mothers felt compelled to ensure that their partners consistently used their language to facilitate language transmission. They pose that this sense of responsibility was influenced by gendered care organisation, as English-speaking mothers typically assumed the role of primary caregivers and spent more time communicating with their children in English. The mothers perceived themselves as having the family obligation to

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<sup>149</sup> Toshie Okita, *Invisible Work: Bilingualism, Language Choice and Childrearing in Intermarried Families* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 222.

<sup>150</sup> Kenall A. King and Lyn Fogle, 'Bilingual Parenting as Good Parenting: Parents' Perspectives on Family Language Policy for Additive Bilingualism', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 9, no. 6 (2006): 695–712.

<sup>151</sup> Okita, *Invisible Work*, 137–48.

promote their children's bilingualism, even if achieving bilingualism themselves or within the gendered division of childcare proved challenging.<sup>152</sup>

These studies highlight mothers' crucial role in shaping their children's bilingualism during early development. However, they did not explore the intersection of family multilingualism with educational institutions such as preschools or international preschools, nor did they investigate the relationship between parenting practices and the utilisation of such institutions.

## The Gendered Practice of Raising Children

In the field of family sociology, it is shown that gender continues to structure family life and the raising of young children, despite both social and political movements orientated towards counterbalancing gender-based roles in family life. Many countries have endeavoured to redistribute caring responsibilities for young children from mothers to fathers. For instance, in Sweden, parental leave policies include a designated quota of days exclusively reserved for fathers. However, whilst this is reported to have increased the number of leave days fathers take, mothers continue to be the prime caregivers for their young children.<sup>153</sup>

The gendered dynamics within the labour market hold significant relevance in working families. Typically, fathers tend to occupy the role of higher earners within families. Consequently, if fathers opt for more extended stays at home, the negative economic repercussions on the family unit become more pronounced, particularly in contexts like Sweden, where parental leave benefits are calculated as a percentage of one's income. Moreover, deeply ingrained gendered societal norms surrounding parenting extend their influence into the labour market, shaping perceptions and practices. Fathers who take extended parental leave are often found to encounter long-term economic setbacks in terms of wage advancement, a predicament not commonly experienced by mothers. This phenomenon is attributed to employer perceptions that fathers who want to stay at home may lack work-based motivation or career drive.<sup>154</sup> The beliefs and practices found in the labour market mirror broader perceptions of parenting and the needs of young children. Raising a child is frequently equated with shaping a future citizen, a perception that invites judgment and makes parents acutely aware of this societal scrutiny.<sup>155</sup> However, it is primarily mothers who continue to bear the brunt of responsibility for the family's

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<sup>152</sup> Piller and Gerber, 'Family Language Policy between the Bilingual Advantage and the Monolingual Mindset'.

<sup>153</sup> Anne Lise Ellingsæter, 'Nordic Politicization of Parenthood: Unfolding Hybridization?', in *The Politicization of Parenthood: Shifting Private and Public Responsibilities in Education and Child Rearing*, ed. Martina Richter and Sabine Andresen (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 39–53.

<sup>154</sup> Katarina Boye and Marie Evertsson, 'Förhandlingar Och Konsekvenser. Arbetsfördelning Och Arbetsliv När Par Blir Föräldrar', in *Sambälle i Förhandling: Vilkor, Processer, Konsekvenser*, ed. Jenny Alsarve and Erik Löfmarck (Örebro universitet: Repro, 2019), 52–67.

<sup>155</sup> Martha Heltsley and Thomas C. Calhoun, 'The Good Mother: Neutralization Techniques Used by Pageant Mothers', *Deviant Behavior* 24, no. 2 (2003): 81–100.

parenting success. As such, attention now turns to examining mothers' challenges and expectations in fulfilling these roles.

A pinnacle work on modern mothering is *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, in which Sharon Hays illustrates how mothers face conflicting cultural expectations about their parenting role.<sup>156</sup> On the one hand, there is a dominating ideal of an “intensive mother”, who holds the responsibility of raising their child (rather than being a family or community project) and should be selfless, placing the needs of their children over themselves. They should extensively invest their money and time in their children. On the other hand, they should be partaking in the labour market, an arena characterised by self-interest and rationality, contradicting how they should be mothering. As a result of these conflicting cultures, she illustrates how modern mothering is a breeding ground for guilt, ambivalence, and worries, which can be related to the responsibility of educational choice. Turning to expert advice is a practice characteristic of modern mothering, which is evidence of how experts and science have gained power in family life, replacing traditional forms of socialising mothers through the community. In this way, standards of mothering come from experts and are externally applied, with mothers measuring themselves and others according to these.<sup>157</sup> Such patterns can be linked to the prevailing notion that the linguistic development of children in interlingual families is primarily the responsibility of the mother, regardless of the specific language dynamics present within the household.<sup>158</sup>

Dominant mothering cultures are often intertwined with national cultures and norms, even though some areas of the world may share similar ideologies. This notion is particularly relevant to the study of families attending international preschools, as many of these families have foreign backgrounds or have spent significant time in other countries. Mothers raising their children in countries with diverging parenting cultures can find themselves navigating conflicting beliefs and practices, leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, as mothers may perceive themselves as failing to meet the standards of either culture. This phenomenon is illustrated by an ethnographic study involving Chinese immigrant mothers in Canada who attended parental classes. These mothers expressed feeling a disconnect between their approach to mothering and the good practices advocated in their new environment. They perceived their traditional Chinese parenting style as overly strict compared to the prevailing norms in their new cultural context.<sup>159</sup>

A class perspective can also be applied to these nationally rooted dominant mothering ideologies; social class intersects with how parents experience and live up to the ideals of intensive mothering, which is formed in relation to middle-

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<sup>156</sup> Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> E.g. Okita, *Invisible Work*; Piller and Gerber, ‘Family Language Policy between the Bilingual Advantage and the Monolingual Mindset’.

<sup>159</sup> Yidan Zhu, ‘Learning to Become Good Mothers: Immigrant Mothers as Adult Learners’, *Adult Education Quarterly* (American Association for Adult and Continuing Education) 70, no. 4 (2020): 377–94.



class practices and possibilities. Social resources emerge as intrinsic when managing the contradictions in mothering roles between work and home life.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, considering the contradictions surrounding national norms, it is reasonable to assume that class intersects with national background. This suggests that middle-class migrant parents, when parenting in cultures with divergent parenting norms, may be able to leverage their class-based resources to address these contradictions more effectively compared to other migrant groups lower down the class hierarchy.

Social class and parenting ideologies are studied by Annette Lareau, who, in her ethnographic study of families belonging to the middle and working classes, poses that parenting practices are class-based, where the middle classes follow “converted cultivation”, and the working classes follow more of a “natural growth” approach.<sup>161</sup> Concerted cultivation, like intensive mothering, demands large investments in time; it is child-centred with the aim to nurture children’s skills in aspects recognised in educational spheres. They organise their families according to schedules, and their children attend numerous activities.<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, in the natural growth approach, parents play a less pivotal role in structuring their children’s everyday lives. This approach is characterised by its less structured nature, where children are afforded more free time to independently explore and develop their practical abilities.<sup>163</sup>

With concerted cultivation as a point of departure, Maud Perrier studies the moral considerations of middle-class mothers in raising their children.<sup>164</sup> She finds that mothers navigate and manage the prevailing discourses surrounding dominant mothering ideals within their social group. In doing so, she poses that they shape their own moral parenting identities, often in contrast to practices associated with concerted cultivation, which they may perceive as excessive. Consequently, her study demonstrates that middle-class mothers not only differentiate their parenting practices from those of the working class but also establish distinctions from others within their socio-economic stratum by forming unique mothering identities.<sup>165</sup> These differences in parenting ideologies within the same social class underscore the intricacies of mothering practices and highlight the influence of home cultures and parents’ own childhood experiences on how they raise their children.<sup>166</sup>

The notion of being a “good” parent or “good” mother was previously shown as intrinsic to parents’ decision-making processes regarding schools, highlighting

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<sup>160</sup> See Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*.

<sup>161</sup> See Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, 1–8.

<sup>162</sup> Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, 33–17, 165–81.

<sup>163</sup> Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, 82–104.

<sup>164</sup> Maud Perrier, ‘Middle-Class Mothers’ Moralities and “Concerted Cultivation”: Class Others, Ambivalence and Excess’, *Sociology* 47, no. 4 (2013): 655–70.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> Carol Vincent and Claire Maxwell, ‘Parenting Priorities and Pressures: Furthering Understanding of “Concerted Cultivation”’, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37, no. 2 (2016): 269–81.

the strong connection between parenting and educational choice. This becomes even more apparent in the realm of ECEC, where the education and well-being of young children are closely intertwined with parenting and caregiving.

## Care and Education in Preschool Markets

From the late 1990s, a wave of sociological research emerged, centring on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) choices, prompted by families' increasing utilisation of such services. This body of research sheds light on the rapidly evolving landscape of ECEC over the past two decades and underscores the variations between national contexts. When considered collectively, these studies demonstrate how the interplay between national policies and local market conditions shapes parents' decisions regarding ECEC.

In several contexts, public funding for ECEC, particularly for the under threes, is limited and less stringent regulations are in place. Such situations give rise to a diverse range of ECEC options, such as childcare centres (which can be likened to preschools), childminders, nannies, and informal arrangements within extended families or social circles, such as grandparents or friends. Each comes with distinct cost implications, availability, location, and attributes such as operating hours, all of which impact parents' ECEC possibilities and shape their parenting cultures.<sup>167</sup> The resulting choices are, therefore, intrinsically tied to employment dynamics – hinging on the necessity for specific operating hours – and the financial means at parents' disposal, given the variances in associated costs.<sup>168</sup>

Apart from the pragmatic attributes of different ECEC options, each alternative provides its own form of education and care, which parents subjectively evaluate in terms of suitability and quality. While not all parents have the option to prioritise this dimension, it remains a concern. The combination of costs, practical considerations, and the subjective, emotional and moral aspects of perceiving suitability for their children makes these markets what Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent term “peculiar” as parents are forced into “putting a price on things beyond price”.<sup>169</sup> For those families limited by pragmatic possibilities, such educational markets become arenas of ambivalence.<sup>170</sup> Huan Chen and Alice

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<sup>167</sup> Elizabeth E. Davis and Rachel Connelly, ‘The Influence of Local Price and Availability on Parents’ Choice of Child Care’, *Population Research and Policy Review* 24, no. 4 (2005): 301–34.

<sup>168</sup> Davis and Connelly; Diane Early and Margaret Burchinal, ‘Early Childhood Care: Relations with Family Characteristics and Preferred Care Characteristics’, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2000): 475–97; Anne S. Johansen, Arleen Leibowitz, and Linda J. Waite, ‘The Importance of Child-Care Characteristics to Choice of Care’, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58, no. 3 (1996): 759–72.

<sup>169</sup> Stephen J. Ball and Carol Vincent, ‘The “Childcare Champion”? New Labour, Social Justice and the Childcare Market’, *British Educational Research Journal* 31, no. 5 (2005): 565.

<sup>170</sup> It is shown that basing choices for ECEC on pragmatic grounds results in lower levels of parental satisfaction. Vicki Peyton et al., ‘Reasons for Choosing Child Care: Associations with Family Factors, Quality, and Satisfaction’, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (2001): 191–208.

Bradbury study parents' attempts to manage both practical and quality aspects of provision and propose that their choice-making process takes a three-phase form. The first involves parents exploring the practical considerations of different providers, such as the age range of children they accept, their opening hours, availability, location, and cost. In instances where parents identify more than setting within their economic resources that fit their needs, they enter a second phase in which they evaluate each according to more subjective emotional aspects, which they term as quality. Following this, parents are said to either make their choice or return to the first phase to compare the practical considerations of those settings they deem of high quality.<sup>171</sup>

The subjective perceptions of quality within ECEC are shown to be gendered and class-based. Considering gender, Vincent and colleagues illuminate that families' process of selecting ECEC for their children is gendered. Mothers are typically responsible for the groundwork, identifying potential settings and accessing the relevant information, with fathers joining the process at a later stage, accompanying their partners on visits.<sup>172</sup> This suggests that fathers typically experience a smaller fraction of the ECEC market, comprising only the settings hand-selected by their partners. Bearing this in mind, a study by Leigh Leslie and colleagues is of particular interest. In their research concerning the characteristics of ECEC that parents deemed most influential in their choices, they found that married men were more focused on the needs of the adults, likely to prioritise cost and convenience, whilst married women showed more interest in the needs of the child and prioritised ratios of children to staff.<sup>173</sup> One plausible inference that can be drawn from this analysis is that mothers' emphasis on subjective quality may be a result of their deeper understanding of the variation among ECEC due to their role in the early selection of viable alternatives. Conversely, if becoming involved in the decision-making process at a later stage, fathers may have a lesser awareness of the considerable variations in the quality of early childhood education provisions and experience settings as relatively similar. However, another possibility is the gendered structure of parenting, where mothers often serve as the primary caregivers. As a result, decisions regarding ECEC options may be influenced more by emotions and morality for mothers than for fathers.

Social class is also shown to be intrinsic in how families navigate ECEC options. There are a number of studies that illustrate how ECEC markets are arenas in which class-based beliefs come to the fore. In contexts where families have the option of preschool-like provision along with childminders, nannies, or even informal arrangements, it is shown that highly educated mothers (which one can take as a measure of social class) have more of a tendency toward preschool-like

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<sup>171</sup> Huan Chen and Alice Bradbury, 'Parental Choice of Childcare in England: Choosing in Phases and the Split Market', *British Educational Research Journal* 46, no. 2 (2020): 281–300.

<sup>172</sup> Carol Vincent, Annette Braun, and Stephen Ball, 'Local Links, Local Knowledge: Choosing Care Settings and Schools', *British Educational Research Journal* 36, no. 2 (2010): 279–98.

<sup>173</sup> Leigh A Leslie, Richard Ettenson, and Patricio Cumsille, 'Selecting a Child Care Center: What Really Matters to Parents?', *Child & Youth Care Forum* 29, no. 5 (2000): 299–322.

care, which is linked to a belief in this form of provision being more suitable for cognitive and academic development.<sup>174</sup> A comparison of middle-class and working-class parents highlighted that working-class mothers frequently felt that childminders were unsafe environments for their children as they were strangers often working alone; they felt more assured by the organisation of preschools resembling regulated public spaces. Middle-class mothers, on the other hand, were anxious regarding the emotional damage preschools may inflict on their children under three; they preferred a more homelike environment with small groups of children and more avenues for successful attachment.<sup>175</sup>

The process of choosing ECEC has also been shown to be rooted in class practices. Despite middle-class and working-class parents typically carrying out similar steps, such as searching for information and then making contact and visiting, middle-class parents are said to visit a greater number of ECEC settings.<sup>176</sup> This pattern may indicate the impact of the limited resources that working-class families possess, which can translate to fewer viable options due to costs as well as the time constraints of less flexible occupations characteristic of the working classes. Moreover, class-specific parenting cultures may influence such practices, with middle-class mothers shown to equate heavy time investments in choosing ECEC to being a good parent.<sup>177</sup> A commonality between social classes is that their choices are shown to be significantly influenced by their gut instinct regarding both the setting itself and the pedagogical staff they met.<sup>178</sup> The practice of doing what “people like us do” is said to be socio-geographically rooted.<sup>179</sup>

The socio-geographic particularities of ECEC choices and parenting are studied by Sarah Holloway, who discusses the moral geographies of mothering.<sup>180</sup> She postulates that local childcare cultures take shape through the dynamic interplay of the availability of ECEC options, associated costs, and family resources (both material and cultural), which shape individuals’ perceptions of ECEC elements. In this context, she elucidates how mothers discern particular choices as either “right” or “wrong”, attributing these distinctions to the uneven distribution of ECEC provision and their local social context. By adopting this approach, she provides valuable insights into how mothers construct notions of

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<sup>174</sup> For the three-plus age range see Johansen, Leibowitz, and Waite, ‘The Importance of Child-Care Characteristics to Choice of Care’; and even for younger children Carol Vincent and Stephen J. Ball, *Childcare, Choice and Class Practices: Middle-Class Parents and Their Children* (London: Routledge, 2006), 117.

<sup>175</sup> Carol Vincent, Annette Braun, and Stephen J. Ball, ‘Childcare, Choice and Social Class: Caring for Young Children in the UK’, *Critical Social Policy* 28, no. 1 (2008): 5–26; Vincent, Braun, and Ball, ‘Local Links, Local Knowledge’, 279–98.

<sup>176</sup> Vincent, Braun, and Ball, ‘Local Links, Local Knowledge’, 284.

<sup>177</sup> Marie Karlsson, Annica Löfdahl, and Héctor Pérez Prieto, ‘Morality in Parents’ Stories of Preschool Choice: Narrating Identity Positions of Good Parenting’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34, no. 2 (2013): 208–24.

<sup>178</sup> Sarah Holloway, ‘Local Childcare Cultures: Moral Geographies of Mothering and the Social Organisation of Pre-School Education’, *Gender, Place & Culture* 5, no. 1 (1998): 10.

<sup>179</sup> Vincent and Ball, *Childcare, Choice and Class Practices*, 163–64.

<sup>180</sup> Holloway, ‘Local Childcare Cultures’.

suitability and quality in different forms of ECEC. Her research, conducted in two socially and geographically distinct areas within the same UK city, reveals that mothers residing in the more affluent area (who were themselves more affluent) tend to reproduce the ideal of good mothering as encompassing a comprehensive knowledge of available ECEC options, thorough assessments of their quality, and successful access to these settings. They were said to source information regarding both childcare alternatives and parenting norms primarily from their longstanding friends and new acquaintances made at antenatal classes.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, these mothers tended to exhibit a conviction in the importance of developmental aspects of ECEC, such as phonics and discipline, in terms of structured routines and learning acceptable social behaviours.

While there were shown to be variations amongst these families regarding their emphasis on educational aspects, the most significant distinctions became apparent when contrasting them with mothers from the less affluent area. Mothers belonging to the less affluent area of the city displayed limited preferences regarding the form and content of education; she summarised that their “knowledge and control of their children’s pre-school education tended to stop at the nursery gate”.<sup>182</sup> Instead, their cultures of mothering are constructed as sending children to Local Education Authority (LEA) preschools, reflecting their wider trust in healthcare professionals as sources of information regarding parenting and ECEC, which leads them towards this form of provision.<sup>183</sup>

So far, the majority of the presented literature has concentrated on contexts featuring a diverse range of ECEC forms. However, even in situations where ECEC is highly regulated and well-funded, it is clear that these educational markets continue to be socially structured. Studying enrolment patterns in preschools in Norway, Nina Drange and Kjetil Telle found evidence of the presence of social segregation that was not driven by neighbourhood segregation. Instead, they conclude that these patterns are predominantly the result of the application behaviours of parents, which they interpret as a possible illustration of class-based preferences or, if no such differences in preferences exist, then a result of more advantaged families gatekeeping their knowledge and information to within only their social networks.<sup>184</sup> This time, in the Swedish context, a further quantitative study explores the preschool and neighbourhood segregation gap, considering geographic contexts and forms of public and private preschool provision.<sup>185</sup> Notably, the preschool-to-neighborhood segregation gap was higher in municipalities with a larger number of private alternatives, particularly in relation to

<sup>181</sup> Holloway, ‘Local Childcare Cultures’, 39.

<sup>182</sup> Holloway, 39.

<sup>183</sup> Holloway, ‘Local Childcare Cultures’.

<sup>184</sup> Nina Drange and Kjetil Telle, ‘Segregation in a Universal Child Care System: Descriptive Findings from Norway’, *European Sociological Review* 36, no. 6 (2020): 886–901.

<sup>185</sup> It should be noted that these public and private options have no direct cost differences. Andreas Alm Fjellborg and Håkan Forsberg, ‘Even in Preschools: Analysing the Preschool and Neighbourhood Segregation Gap in Swedish Municipalities’, *European Sociological Review* 39, no. 5 (2023): 677–91.

segregation by educational background and high income.<sup>186</sup> This pattern suggests that despite the high level of regulation in the context, meaning that no cost differences between preschools exist, local preschool markets continue to be arenas where families carry out socially stratified educational choices.

This notion is further evidenced by Håkan Forsberg and colleagues, who explore enrolment patterns in different types of preschools (municipal, for-profit, and non-profit), considering social class. They show that children from the middle and upper middle classes are more likely to attend for-profit and non-profit preschools than those from the working class who are overrepresented in municipal preschools. This is a finding mirrored in the Finnish context, where children with highly educated parents are overrepresented in private preschools.<sup>187</sup>

Much of the literature concerning the ECEC choice practices of the middle classes illustrates that this group places quality as of high importance and frequently invests significant amounts of time in identifying good quality settings for their children. However, the aforementioned study by Forsberg and colleagues also indicates that these families are not necessarily receiving better quality provision, at least not according to the measures of structural quality they measured.<sup>188</sup> Quality differences between preschools are also the focus of a sociological study concerning preschools in Germany. Juliane Stahl and colleagues employ a wide range of measures of quality, which they categorise as either observable or less observable. They find that children with migrant backgrounds and those with low-educated parents were more often found to attend preschools with somewhat lower scores of observable quality. They also unveiled associations with social background and less-observable quality indicators, which they suggest may be explained by parents not considering these aspects in their choices but rather their preferences for such characteristics as specific pedagogical approaches may correlate with such less-observable aspects.<sup>189</sup> This could, therefore, be a further illustration of class-based preferences in ECEC markets, where characteristics such as private and public or the pedagogical content of provision,<sup>190</sup> hold different meanings for families, particularly in relation to socio-geographic frameworks.<sup>191</sup>

As demonstrated in this section, parents' perspectives and interactions within ECEC markets are intricately woven into the fabric of socio-geographic and gen-

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ville Ruutiainen, Eija Räikkönen, and Maarit Alasuutari, 'Socioeconomic and Attitudinal Differences between Service Users of Private and Public Early Childhood Education and Care in the Finnish Context', *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 17, no. 1 (2023): 16.

<sup>188</sup> Forsberg, Waddling, and Fjellborg, 'Class-Based Preschool Enrolment - Social Stratification and Quality Differences in the Swedish Preschool Market'.

<sup>189</sup> Juliane Stahl, Pia Schober, and Katharina Spiess, 'Parental Socio-Economic Status and Childcare Quality: Early Inequalities in Educational Opportunity?', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 44 (2018): 304–17.

<sup>190</sup> Ruutiainen, Räikkönen, and Alasuutari, 'Socioeconomic and Attitudinal Differences between Service Users of Private and Public Early Childhood Education and Care in the Finnish Context'; Vincent, Braun, and Ball, 'Local Links, Local Knowledge'.

<sup>191</sup> Holloway, 'Local Childcare Cultures'.

dered parenting frameworks. This perspective, coupled with the idea that international education is linked to a pathway for attaining social advantage, is integrated into this study alongside an examination of the internal dynamics of families and their language practices.

## Contribution of the Thesis

This study bridges several research themes through its focus on international preschools. The majority of previous research concerning international educational institutions concerns schools rather than preschools, meaning that the logic driving the choice of international education for such young children is somewhat of a lacuna in sociological research. Studying families' choices and the use of such provision allows for capturing what is at stake for families regarding internationality in educational arenas where skills for academic and labour market success are of little relevance and forms of advantages and disadvantages are less clearly defined.

There is a general absence of literature that studies the whole population of international educational institutions in a local context, even at the school level. Thus, this thesis contributes by addressing this gap in research. It studies international preschools as educational options for families within a wider preschool landscape. The context of the study, Stockholm, Sweden, allows for the study of international preschools that are embedded with localised preschool landscapes that typically are exempt from cost differences between institutions. As these preschools operate within local preschool markets, the study contributes by exploring the decision to choose this type of provision among many available options presented to parents through free-choice policies. This means that the study captures how families identify and relate to the various options available to them. As shown in the research concerning preschool choice, such processes are somewhat particular due to the age of children and the strong emphasis on care, which sheds light on the relationship between internationality and care and parenting cultures. Furthermore, the thesis is not limited to studying only migrant or domestic families. Instead, it has its point of departure in the spectrum of families encountering international education to illuminate the diversity of practices, perceptions and experiences amongst families.<sup>192</sup> In particular is the relevance of families' linguistic and cultural distinctions, especially regarding multilingualism, to bridge the research concerning parenting multilingual children and their uses of international educational institutions in these practices.

Finally, while the thesis concentrates on international preschools, it sheds light on broader processes occurring within families regarding the organisation of their children's upbringing and the role of preschools in this context. It positions preschool choice, whether international or non-international, as a situation that

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<sup>192</sup> Albeit with a middle-class focus within the interview study.

## PLAYING WITH THE GLOBAL

highlights family dynamics and parenting, particularly concerning aspects such as language, culture, gender, and privileged migration.



## CHAPTER 3

# Theory

The objective of this chapter is to introduce the theories and concepts that have been employed when building the theoretical framework of the thesis. The relational sociology of Pierre Bourdieu forms the foundation of the study's design and execution. Additional concepts from the field of family sociology are utilised, which are complementary to Bourdieu's sociology and focus towards the inner workings of family life.

### Framing Educational Choices Relationally

Opting to enrol one's child at an international preschool, such as with international schools, is a distinct choice. While international education is commonly debated on a global scale regarding its legitimacy,<sup>193</sup> families are recognised in this thesis as navigating these discussions and managing their children's education within the framework of national educational systems. International preschools are seen as gaining significance through their differences from other preschools in their national context and their association with the social hierarchies and differentiations among families utilising the preschool system. Thus, the relationship between families encountering and making choices in the preschool landscape is constructed as the social context for understanding how global class-based dynamics of internationality, as debated regarding international schools, manifest within a local preschool landscape in Stockholm.

This social context, in which international preschools are embedded, is shaped by the social hierarchies and distinctions amongst families engaging with the preschool sector. These hierarchies and distinctions between families are formed and upheld by the unequal distribution of capital and social characteristics among them.<sup>194</sup> Whilst the concept of capital and its use in the thesis will be addressed more thoroughly in the subsequent section of this chapter, it is crucial to touch upon several aspects at this juncture due to capital's inherent significance in Bourdieu's

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<sup>193</sup> E.g. Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 'What Is International about International Schools?'

<sup>194</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field: General Sociology, Volume 2* (Cambridge, UK; Polity Press, 2019); For an extensive explanation of Bourdieu's relational sociology see: Donald Broady, *Sociologi och epistemologi. Om Pierre Bourdieus författarskap och den historiska epistemologin* (Stockholm: Högsk. för lärutbildning, 1991).

relational sociology. Capital comprises the social characteristics recognised as holding value, with the amount and species of capital an individual possesses determining their manoeuvrability within social hierarchies and power structures.<sup>195</sup> This principle applies equally to families, as the amalgamation of their capital in comparison to other families yields similar effects. Capital becomes intrinsic for studying families' encounters with the preschool landscape and their choice of international preschools for a number of reasons. The possession and quantity of specific species of capital influence encounters with the education system.

On the one hand, this influence can manifest directly, such as in determining residential locations and subsequently shaping localised choices. Additionally, it extends to classed behaviours, such as perceptions of gender, which leads to gender-structured specialisations at later stages of education.<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, endeavours to preserve the significance of specific species of capital or the worth of social attributes through their institutionalisation in the education system play a crucial role in how families make choices. Thus, studying preschool choice from a relational perspective utilises families' possession of capital and social characteristics as an explanatory model.<sup>197</sup>

Bourdieu developed two concepts for understanding relational space: social field and social space. Whilst the relational principles are similar, there are some key distinctions. Most prominent is that a social field is the site of a struggle over a specific symbolic capital. These social arenas have developed over time through a process of differentiation in relation to the broader society.<sup>198</sup> In contrast, social space is more general and less defined by specific struggles.<sup>199</sup> This thesis does not attempt to construct preschools as forming a social field. Instead, it leans on the notion of social space and focuses on the structure of the relationship between individuals<sup>200</sup> according to their particular constellations of valued and unvalued social characteristics that translate into hierarchies and distinctions.<sup>201</sup> The social space (in the definite article) typically refers to the whole society within which that being studied is immersed.<sup>202</sup> Here, one sees how resources such as income

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<sup>195</sup> Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 277.

<sup>196</sup> E.g. Mikael Börjesson et al., 'Cultural Capital in the Elite Subfield of Swedish Higher Education', *Poetics* 56, no. 56 (2016): 15–34.

<sup>197</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 112–14.

<sup>198</sup> E.g. in the academic field Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); the field of cultural production Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993); and the scientific field Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2004).

<sup>199</sup> Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field*, 227.

<sup>200</sup> Individual can here mean between families, parents, or between preschools.

<sup>201</sup> Or more specifically capital species, which are addressed in the following section.

<sup>202</sup> In his work *Distinction* social structures apparent in France are under study, even if using a sample of this population to empirically unveil these. Bourdieu, *Distinction*; In Bourdieu's discussions on the field of power we see that this is a national space. Loïc J. D. Wacquant, 'From Ruling Class to Field of Power: An Interview with Pierre Bourdieu on La Noblesse d'État', *Theory, Culture & Society* 10, no. 3 (1993): 19–44.

and educational level, along with social characteristics such as ethnicity and gender, translate into patterns of power and social advantage.<sup>203</sup>

A social space approach can be utilised for studying more limited spaces such as local physical spaces, institutions, individuals that share a common characteristic<sup>204</sup> or in cases where specific populations of individuals are of interest.<sup>205</sup> In other words, the social space approach allows one to study social happenings by unveiling their association to the relevant hierarchies in which they take place. Thus, the social happening of preschool choice is understood in relation to the population of families partaking in the preschool landscape. Despite delimiting the population studied, it is still assumed to capture broader social structures (such as the advantage that economic resources bring); however, it becomes possible to identify specific social characteristics that have more weight and worth in the population under study. In doing so, the more detailed workings of the specific space can be revealed, as they are not hidden by the overarching hierarchies in the wider social space.

## Studying Families In and As Relational Spaces

The relational approach is employed in two distinct manners, encapsulating the thesis' construction of preschool choice being shaped by families' social positions in relation to one another and by internal negotiations within the families themselves. Consequently, the study examines two interconnected social spaces: one pertaining to the social relationships between families and another concerning individual families' dynamics. In essence, families are constructed as individuals functioning as a unit, or, as Bourdieu puts it, a "body",<sup>206</sup> and simultaneously comprised of individuals who hold social positions both internal and external to the family.<sup>207</sup> Thus, parents and families are studied as embedded in multiple arenas of intersecting social structures. They function as units to secure their social positions in relation to other families and are sites for social struggles over the inner workings of family life and access to social positions outside of the family on an individual level. Both are perceived as influential in how families raise their children and choose preschools.

In his studies of peasants in Kabylia, Algeria, and Béarn, France, in the 1950s and 1960s, Bourdieu demonstrated that social reproduction was intricately linked to families functioning as cohesive units. They acted together, both consciously and unconsciously, to maintain their social status and accumulate

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<sup>203</sup> Will Atkinson, *Bourdieu and after: A Guide to Relational Phenomenology* (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 130.

<sup>204</sup> E.g. the academic prizewinners studied in Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*; and such as inside the Berber house and large cities Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 42, no. 1 (2018): 106–14.

<sup>205</sup> For instance, Emil Bertilsson, 'Skollärare. Rekrytering till utbildning och yrke 1977–2009' (Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2014) studies upper-secondary school teachers.

<sup>206</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 67.

<sup>207</sup> See Appendix The family Spirit Bourdieu, 64–74.

material wealth. Families' inheritance and marriage strategies were advantageous for the group, and each member played a crucial role in sustaining or enhancing the family's position relative to other families.<sup>208</sup> Through the process of institutionalisation, new members of the family were integrated, fostering feelings of affection and belonging.<sup>209</sup> Whether born into or married into the family, these bonds drive the family's success as they share a joint desire to care for one another and act as a family. Simultaneously, integration into the family is also the integration of new members into their positions in the internal social space of the family.<sup>210</sup>

However, this process of socialisation into the family does not negate the possibility of resistance to the family's social structure; each member possesses their own interests and beliefs, which may diverge from those of the family unit. This becomes especially pertinent in highly differentiated societies like contemporary Sweden, where various species of symbolic capital coexist and vie for prominence,<sup>211</sup> potentially complicating the dynamic of the family unit or the collective power that families can wield. Nowadays, the family has a weaker, or less explicit, role in paths of social reproduction. States have invested in education and social welfare programmes to enable individuals to succeed without solely relying on their families' resources, and with the evolution of gender equality, expectations and cultures for women's lives outside families have been secured. However, as decades of sociology of education have shown, the ideologies of universalism, individualisation and meritocracy function as smokescreens for the continuation of the impact social background, i.e. the family, has on social reproduction. What these processes have done, however, is enable individuals within families to acquire resources that can call into question the historically formed social structures within families.

Will Atkinson, who builds on Bourdieu's studies of families, elucidates that the structures of familial spaces are influenced by the social position or power the members have externally to the family.<sup>212</sup> A clear example here is gendered roles within families, where patriarchal family structures are broken down by women's economic independence and educational and occupational possibilities despite the prevailing domination of man in familial structures perpetuating in different forms.<sup>213</sup> While the structures may have undergone some transformation and the resources available to family members for their internal struggles may have shifted, families can continue to be seen as functioning as bodies, albeit predominantly on a smaller scale. Therefore, the significance of studying families in both these forms

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<sup>208</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'Marriage Strategies as Strategies of Social Reproduction', in *Family and Society Selections from the Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, ed. Robert Forster and Orest Ranun (Baltimore/London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 117–44.

<sup>209</sup> Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 67–69.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> See Bourdieu, Pierre, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (Westport: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

<sup>212</sup> Albeit using the term field rather than space Will Atkinson, 'A Sketch of "family" as a Field: From Realized Category to Space of Struggle', *Acta Sociologica* 57, no. 3 (2014): 223–35.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

– as units and as individual members possessing their own distinct social assets – becomes crucial for comprehending their preschool choices. Families are engaged in continual negotiation between existing in these divergent forms.

This study constructs families as comprising just two parents and one or more children, a much smaller social unit compared to those Bourdieu examined. However, it reflects the reality of many families today, who often have weaker connections to their extended family and may live separately, even across different towns or countries – such as many of the parents interviewed in the framework of this thesis. Moreover, they typically live in these units, combining resources and organising their lives in partnership. These families are regarded as embodying a family-specific doxa,<sup>214</sup> formed through the convergence of the parents’ individual beliefs and values, shaped by their individual experiences and possession of capital.

They have a common identity as a family, sharing beliefs about what their family does, what they like, and what they should do.<sup>215</sup> Moreover, they have united interests, the perpetuation of their family and their child’s future social position. However, given that the family-specific doxa is shaped by internal structures within the family, it remains susceptible to renegotiation. Specific situations give rise to these renegotiations, and in the context of this thesis, families’ first encounter with institutionalised education is constructed as one such moment. As families navigate the socially structured preschool landscape – an environment where beliefs and values come to the forefront – they are studied as both operating as cohesive units with their shared “we”, while simultaneously engaging as individuals to assert their specific species of capital and social characteristics for investment and recognition within the education system. Thus, utilising the concept of family-specific doxa illuminates the dual social processes occurring and influencing families’ encounters with the preschool landscape.

## Capital: National and International

The premises of capital and its function within the study have already been touched upon. This section elaborates on the concept and outlines further details of its specific utilisation. So far, capital has been described as forming the social structures of the families under study, with few details on what capital comprises and the relevance it holds for studying educational choices. Economic, symbolic, and social capital are influential in social hierarchies and power structures. The worth of economic capital is rather self-explanatory; the higher the level of economic resources one possesses, the greater the possibilities and manoeuvrability one has in nearly all aspects of daily life. Economic capital determines where one can reside, shapes lifestyle activities, and is associated with health and educational outcomes. Moreover, economic capital is instrumental in families’ possibilities

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

and behaviours on educational markets,<sup>216</sup> even when economic means do not directly dictate access to educational institutions.<sup>217</sup>

Symbolic capital has many species and can be specific to particular social groups, workplaces, socio-geographic contexts, etc.<sup>218</sup> In essence, symbolic capital comprises assets that are given recognition, whether widely acknowledged or confined to specific contexts and individuals. The crux of symbolic capital lies in the competition among individuals and groups to elevate and sustain the value of their symbolic goods, converting these assets into forms of prestige, status, and other species of capital. The recognition and negotiation of these symbolic values are ongoing processes, and the social arenas where individuals compete are intrinsic to understanding the dynamics of symbolic capital. The value of these symbolic assets, such as mastery in particular languages, may be acknowledged in some contexts but not others, highlighting symbolic capital's potential fluidity and context-dependent nature.<sup>219</sup> This is particularly relevant to the study of international preschools, as these institutions, akin to international schools, are situated within global spheres where discourses on legitimacy and prestige are prevalent. However, they are also firmly embedded within national and local contexts and associated with different social groups, where the worth of certain symbolic assets may vary. Therefore, studying international preschools requires consideration of how symbolic capital is valued and contested across different social arenas, spanning both international and local landscapes.

Cultural capital is one species of symbolic capital and, in its embodied state, refers to recognised cultural habits, tastes, and experiences typically associated with dominant social groups. In its objectified state, cultural capital can be seen as material items that represent the embodied state. Finally, institutionalised cultural capital can include individuals' educational certification and association with particular educational institutions.<sup>220</sup> Cultural capital has been demonstrated to be inherent in the ways that families navigate education systems, with cultural assets and distinctions linked to individuals' different choices in education systems, even in contexts where direct economic limitations are removed.<sup>221</sup> Social capital refers to social resources. Through an individual's social network, they can access information and opportunities to uphold and strengthen their social posi-

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<sup>216</sup> E.g. Davis and Connelly, 'The Influence of Local Price and Availability on Parents' Choice of Child Care'.

<sup>217</sup> E.g. Alm Fjellborg and Forsberg, 'Even in Preschools'.

<sup>218</sup> Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 47–52.

<sup>219</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 119–20; Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 102–4; Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 240–45.

<sup>220</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 184.

<sup>221</sup> E.g. Ida Lidegran, 'Utbildningskapital: Om hur det alstras, fördelas och förmedlas' (Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för utbildning, kultur och medier, 2009); Mikael Palme, 'Det kulturella kapitalet: Studier av symboliska tillgångar i det svenska utbildningssystemet 1988–2008' (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2008).

tion. A prime illustration lies in the transformative potential of social networks, which can open doors to employment prospects.<sup>222</sup>

Of particular interest to this study is the notion that capital can be nationally bound. For example, the embodied state of cultural capital, associated with the cultural practices of the dominant class, is intricately linked to specific national contexts,<sup>223</sup> despite being called into question by elite transnational groups. Within the context of international education, which operates within the intersecting realms of both national and global spheres, distinctions in cultural capital among families become paramount. This includes the cultural and symbolic goods acquired in other nation-states and international spheres, which become focal points for contention when individuals encounter the structures that assign value to this species of capital within Sweden.

A further pertinent capital species that is gaining increased attention in Bordieusian-inspired studies is “international capital” or “cosmopolitan capital”, said to be of growing worth since the spurring of globalisation and internationalisation of institutions.<sup>224</sup> The species of this capital is somewhat blurred, not least in name.<sup>225</sup> Felix Bühlmann outlines two main but diverging streams concerning what international or cosmopolitan capital are and how they are constructed. On the one hand, there are those who suggest the concept is intrinsically attached to the concept of field, and on the other hand, those who perceive it more as a general resource and not bound to a field.<sup>226</sup> This thesis takes the latter approach, acknowledging the worth of transnational attributes, i.e. whether they function as a capital, is determined by the spaces within which individuals are interacting.

A common theme amongst much of the research that utilises the concept of international capital (in its varied terminology) is that it is constructed as a sub-species of cultural capital that challenges the legitimacy of national cultural and symbolic capital. According to Anne-Catherine Wagner, international capital is not solely a species of cultural capital but simultaneously cultural, linguistic, and social capital. Similar to other capital species, international capital is said to be inherited or acquired, with its acquisition gained through time in foreign countries or international educational institutions. She argues that in its broadest

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<sup>222</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, ‘The Forms of Capital’, 21–24.

<sup>223</sup> Umut Erel, ‘Migrating Cultural Capital: Bourdieu in Migration Studies’, *Sociology* 44, no. 4 (2010): 642–60.

<sup>224</sup> E.g. Felix Bühlmann, Thomas David, and André Mach, ‘Cosmopolitan Capital and the Internationalization of the Field of Business Elites: Evidence from the Swiss Case’, *Cultural Sociology* 7, no. 2 (2013): 211–29; Igarashi and Saito, ‘Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital’; André Jansson, ‘How to Become an “Elite Cosmopolitan”: The Mediatized Trajectories of United Nations Expatriates’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, no. 5 (2016): 465–80; Weenink, ‘Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital’.

<sup>225</sup> Bühlmann, David, and Mach, ‘Cosmopolitan Capital and the Internationalization of the Field of Business Elites: Evidence from the Swiss Case’.

<sup>226</sup> Felix Bühlmann, ‘How to Study Elites’ “International Capital”? Some Methodological Reflections’, in *Researching Elites and Power: Theory, Methods, Analyses*, ed. Francois Denord, Mikael Palme, and Bertrand Réau, vol. 16, Methodos (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 241–52.

sense, international capital is the ability to feel at home in other nation-states.<sup>227</sup> However, she also indicates that international capital does not inherently possess the potential to produce effects on its own. Instead, it primarily functions as an augmenter of other resources, suggesting that international capital can only be activated among those who already possess secure social resources.<sup>228</sup>

Such as with cultural capital, international capital is said to comprise institutionalised, embodied, and objectified states. Institutionalised is educational certification from international schools or schools or institutions abroad, or even the certification of linguistic skills. Objectified states can include such things as owning books in foreign languages, having “authentic” (rather than tourist) ornamental items from other countries,<sup>229</sup> or, such as experienced within one of the interviews that took place for this study, the decoration of a wall with a large world map containing pins placed in those countries visited. Embodied can include being able to speak languages and having an openness to other cultures.

A problem that arises when attempting to conceive international capital is what it specifically equates to, particularly considering the idea that it functions more as an amplifier of other social resources.<sup>230</sup> For example, not all languages are equally valued, illustrating the negotiations that take place in different arenas. There is an idea that international capital can be linked to globally powerful countries,<sup>231</sup> an example here being the wide recognition of the English language. The process concerning the inheritance, (re)production, and the acquisition of international capital have been studied in numerous national contexts and at the primary and secondary school level as well as university.<sup>232</sup> However, the processes of young children’s acquisition of international capital within the context of their early socialisation are somewhat of a lacuna.

In this dissertation, the term transnational capital will be used, rather than cosmopolitan capital or international capital, a decision based on Jane Knight’s definition of international as referring to relationships between different nation-states, whilst transnational is said to refer to that which is cross-border.<sup>233</sup> Merging

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<sup>227</sup> Anne-Catherine Wagner, ‘Les classes dominantes à l’épreuve de la mondialisation’, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 190, no. 5 (2011): 4–9.

<sup>228</sup> Anne-Catherine Wagner, ‘The Internationalization of Elite Education. Merging Angles of Analysis and Building a Research Object’, in *Researching Elites and Power*, ed. Francois Denord, Mikael Palme, and Bertrand Réau, Methodos (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 193–200.

<sup>229</sup> Quentin Maire, ‘International Capital and Social Class: A Sociology of International Certification in French Urban School Markets’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 43, no. 8 (2022): 1176.

<sup>230</sup> Wagner, ‘The Internationalization of Elite Education. Merging Angles of Analysis and Building a Research Object’.

<sup>231</sup> Jongyoung Kim, ‘Global Cultural Capital and Global Positional Competition: International Graduate Students’ Transnational Occupational Trajectories’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37, no. 1 (2016): 30–50 uses the example of an American university degree providing Korean students with this global cultural capital.

<sup>232</sup> Bühlmann, ‘How to Study Elites’ “International Capital”? Some Methodological Reflections’.

<sup>233</sup> Knight, ‘Internationalization Remodeled’.



similar definitions from Anne-Catherine Wagner and Anne-Sophie Delval and Felix Bühlmann, the definition used within this thesis is that transnational capital *is an amalgamation of cultural, linguistic, social, and institutionalised assets that are both inherited and acquired through international or transnational mobility or exposure to international environments.*<sup>234</sup>

The concept of transnational capital is used in two ways in the thesis. On the one hand, international preschools are conceived as possible holders of transnational capital. On the other hand, parents can possess transnational capital alongside nation-specific species of capital.<sup>235</sup> Thus, when considering families' compositions of species of capital and social characteristics, the national and transnational nature of these is explored.

## Choice, Dispositions, and Practices

“Choice” is a fundamental aspect of the thesis; however, it is used with a particular definition, which in the Bourdieusian sense involves the recognition that these choices are practices not made in a vacuum but are the product of individuals' habitus and dispositions.<sup>236</sup>

Habitus is embodied capital, formed through one's social conditioning (i.e. socialisation) throughout life, starting from young childhood.<sup>237</sup> It is the internalised principles of individuals' dispositions; their beliefs, preferences, and practices. Dispositions are thus the manifestation of the habitus and are the more tangible expressions of habitus, such as ways of talking,<sup>238</sup> preferences and consumption of goods and culture,<sup>239</sup> and educational beliefs and school choice.<sup>240</sup> As a result of social conditioning, the habitus is specific to its position in the social space and simultaneously reproduces the objective structures that created it.<sup>241</sup> The relationship between the habitus and its social position can be seen as having a logic; its actions make sense considering the agents' composition of capital and assets. Thus, the social positions parents hold are key within the thesis, used to understand their beliefs and actions concerning the upbringing of their children, how they present their lives, and the educational choices they make for their young children.

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<sup>234</sup> Anne-Sophie Delval and Felix Bühlmann, 'Strategies of Social (Re)Production within International Higher Education: The Case of Swiss Hospitality Management Schools', *Higher Education* 79, no. 3 (2020): 481; Wagner, 'Les classes dominantes à l'épreuve de la mondialisation', 4–9.

<sup>235</sup> Weiss, 'The Transnationalization of Social Inequality'.

<sup>236</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 170.

<sup>237</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 87.

<sup>238</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 37.

<sup>239</sup> See Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

<sup>240</sup> E.g. Judith Glaesser and Barry Cooper, 'Using Rational Action Theory and Bourdieu's Habitus Theory Together to Account for Educational Decision-Making in England and Germany', *Sociology* 48, no. 3 (2014): 463–81; Romina Madrid Miranda, 'Choosing By Habitus: Multi-Case Study of Families & Schools in the Context of School Choice' (Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, 2016), <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/181772>.

<sup>241</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 86.

One's habitus and, thus, dispositions are individual; even if there are similarities between those who have shared similar social conditions, they are not identical.<sup>242</sup> Here, parenting becomes of interest, as does the concept of family-specific doxa, as raising a child is the joint project of the two individual parents. Although parents may have similar habitus, as they often belong to the same class background,<sup>243</sup> they are two individuals with distinct beliefs and preferences. Particular to the families in the study, a number comprise parents from different countries. Indeed, the composition of capital within the family unit and the negotiations surrounding their value have been discussed in relation to the upbringing of children and the dynamics of family life. However, the study focuses on understanding the intricate relationship between the composition of different species of capital within families, often acquired in different national arenas, and their systems of dispositions, or habitus, that emerge from their social positions shaped by the possession of capital in particular national contexts.<sup>244</sup> As families navigate the value-laden preschool landscape, where habitus serves as an embodied form of capital, the relationship between their compositions of capital and their dispositions uncovers the mechanisms driving their preschool choices, which may be a situation of renegotiation for the family-specific doxa.

A complementary concept to studying the international dynamics of family in this way is family practices, addressed by David Morgan.<sup>245</sup> While his focus may not always be on social positions, family practices can serve as tangible manifestations of family-specific doxa. With a focus on family practices within the stories of families, interview material can capture and analyse how beliefs and values are expressed in everyday life, offering insights into the underlying dynamics of family-specific doxa. Through their practices, families define the essence of what constitutes their family.<sup>246</sup> This extends to determining which individuals are considered part of the family unit and shaping the collective understanding of what the family represents, much like its specific doxa. Moreover, it is through their family practices that families are shown to shape and reproduce the roles in the family.<sup>247</sup>

Bringing a more Boudieusian approach to this can also illuminate the power that social structures external to the family exert on their internal dynamics. Family practices emphasise everyday small actions and utterances and conceive these as embedded in structures of meaning. The main point of the specificity of the concept of family practices in relation to just practices is that these practices focus on

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<sup>242</sup> Such as a gendered habitus Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

<sup>243</sup> For example, Stefan B. Andrade and Jens-Peter Thomsen, 'Educational Assortative Mating: A Micro-educational Approach', *The British Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 4 (2019): 1245–75 shows micro-educational homogamy.

<sup>244</sup> Loïc Wacquant, 'A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus', *The Sociological Review (Keele)* 64, no. 1 (2016): 64–72.

<sup>245</sup> David H. J. Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices* (Basingstoke: Palgrave : Macmillan, 2011); David H. G. Morgan, 'Locating "Family Practices"', *Sociological Research Online* 16, no. 4 (2011): 174–82.

<sup>246</sup> It is through their practices that the 'sense of family is reconstituted', see Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices*, 10.

<sup>247</sup> See Morgan, *Rethinking Family Practices*.

members of the (self-perceived family) and have a meaning within the family. Morgan suggests that studying family practices does not obscure the structural constraints or hierarchies that exist and penetrate into family life, but rather that the concept opens the possibilities of studying families' everyday experiences within them.<sup>248</sup> Thus, focusing on the families themselves situates their educational choices, understood as a specific family practice in forming the family's identity, and emerges as intrinsic to their encounters with the preschool landscape.

More recently, the notion of displaying family has been addressed in family sociology. Janet Finch builds on the work of Morgan, and whilst she tends to focus on broadening the definition of family and acknowledging the borders of families as fluid and transient, she argues that through processes of display, families manage the need and desire to socialise their children equally into their position as the product of the two distinct parents. In this sense, displays of family identity, as presented in interviews, showcase one's family to others. How families present a united front, a joint family picture,<sup>249</sup> is an expression of their family-specific doxa.

## Preschool as a Site of Socialisation

In this thesis, preschool is conceived as an integral environment for young children's socialisation. Socialisation is the process, or "naturalisation" of social hierarchies, in which individuals learn, in a typically inexplicit way, to incorporate and reproduce the social order.<sup>250</sup> It is the process within which the meaning of symbols of divisions in the social world are learnt and reproduced, such as between gender, class, and ethnicity.<sup>251</sup> The family typically stands as the principal institution for socialisation, shaping children's understanding of the world and transmitting the tastes and lifestyles characteristic of their familial environment.<sup>252</sup> As a socially embedded process occurring through interactions with others, individuals in educational institutions, where children now frequently spend significant amounts of time, become influential agents in this process.<sup>253</sup> This is particularly pertinent in the context of young children in Sweden, where the highly subsidised preschool sector caters to the majority of young children, including those as young as one year old. Moreover, the cultural norms surrounding

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<sup>248</sup> Morgan, 'Locating "Family Practices"'.  
<sup>249</sup> Janet Finch, 'Displaying Families', *Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2007): 65–81.

<sup>250</sup> Bourdieu, *Habitus and Field*, 136.

<sup>251</sup> Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 474–75.

<sup>252</sup> See Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>253</sup> Preschool occupies a prominent role in socialisation studies within the sociology of childhood or children. Here, its significance is closely tied to the unique position and construct of childhood, as well as the exploration of children's agency in shaping social structures, see William A. Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2011); Heather Beth Johnson, 'From the Chicago School to the New Sociology of Children: The Sociology of Children and Childhood in the United States, 1900–1999', *Advances in Life Course Research* 6 (2001): 53–93.

the use of preschool position these publicly funded institutions as integral components of families' efforts in raising their children, extending the socialisation process beyond the family. Whilst this notion of preschool being integral to children's socialisation functions as the backdrop for the study, the process itself is not in focus. Rather, the emphasis lies in recognising the potential role that preschool environments may play in children's lives and examining how families perceive and interact with this aspect of their children's upbringing.

In young children's encounters with preschool, they meet a world structured by a certain logic, which may or may not reflect what they are exposed to in their home and social worlds outside of preschool. Children may speak a different language to that of their preschool, which demotes their home language development to mother tongue tutoring. Furthermore, pedagogical staff's perceptions of children's abilities can be shaded by their linguistic development, instilling notions of success in education at a young age.<sup>254</sup> International preschools become of interest here as they orientate themselves towards particular national and international spaces, valuing particular forms of internationality. In these preschools, children's foreign languages may be a valued asset, but one that they cannot yet use to their advantage outside of this space.

Social class, ethnicity, and gender are shown to structure the environment of preschools, and already, at this young age, children are socialised into the meaning and power or disadvantage associated with these social characteristics. For example, the social class and ethnic composition of preschools shape the rules and behavioural norms the settings' staff sets.<sup>255</sup> More academic learning activities, and gentle guidance in teaching and behavioural cultures are associated with preschools where the majority of children are middle-class.<sup>256</sup> Even in social interactions between children, such social characteristics can be used as a form of symbolic power,<sup>257</sup> influencing how adults behave towards children.<sup>258</sup> This evidences that the socialisation that takes place within the preschool setting is not only through the interactions between adults and young children but also the direct interaction between children. Even at this early age, the structures of the unequal distribution of social resources are practised by children.<sup>259</sup>

Placing preschool as a part of the process of socialisation provides a further perspective to the study of families' use of preschool for their children. Whilst

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<sup>254</sup> Sara Meadows, *The Child as Social Person* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 210–12.

<sup>255</sup> Casey Stockstill, 'The "Stuff" of Class: How Property Rules in Preschool Reproduce Class Inequality', *Social Problems* 70, no. 1 (2023): 1–21.

<sup>256</sup> E.g. Heidi M Gansen, 'Disciplining Difference(s): Reproducing Inequalities through Disciplinary Interactions in Preschool', *Social Problems* 68, no. 3 (2020): 740–60; Margaret K. Nelson and Rebecca Schutz, 'Day Care Differences and the Reproduction of Social Class', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36, no. 3 (2007): 281–317.

<sup>257</sup> Wilfried Lignier, 'Symbolic Power for Beginners: The Very First Social Efforts to Control Others' Actions and Perceptions', *Sociological Theory* 39, no. 4 (2021): 201–24.

<sup>258</sup> Jessi Streib, 'Class Reproduction by Four Year Olds', *Qualitative Sociology* 34, no. 2 (2011): 337–52.

<sup>259</sup> Wilfried Lignier, 'The Discovery of Symbolic Violence: How Toddlers Learn to Prevail with Words', *Ethnography* 22, no. 2 (2021): 246–66; Lignier.

families may not consciously understand or acknowledge their positions within social structures and the meanings they ascribe to divisions in the social world, when choosing social environments for their children, they often search for those where they feel at home. With international preschools distinguishing themselves from non-international preschools, they can be seen as breaking with some of the more national hierarchies nurtured through non-international preschools.



## Methods, Materials, and Populations

Following a relational approach, this study has been designed, and the methods and materials selected, to explore the interplay of relational structures that exist between families and international preschools. The research strategy entails analysing two primary forms of data: individual-level register data and interviews with parents. This approach aims to capture both objective and subjective structures. In conjunction with these two main sources, a number of interviews with pedagogical personnel working in international preschools have been incorporated. This chapter presents the methodological choices regarding the data sources, data collection, and analyses. To commence, the study's geographic delimitations and the selection of a population of international preschools are discussed.

### A Geographical Delimitation of the Preschool Landscape

In the context of this study, international preschools are regarded as being embedded within local preschool markets, a perspective that guides both the statistical and qualitative analyses. The term market is used broadly here, simply referring to the possibility parents have to apply to their favoured preschool within their municipality of residence.<sup>260</sup> Conceptually, this arena is perceived more as a landscape which parents navigate. While this approach may at times not capture the realities of parents' preschool enrolment practices, which are often more geographically restrained,<sup>261</sup> the inclusion of entire municipalities allows for situating families within their wider preschool possibilities and social context.

In the early stage of the study's formation, an initial nationwide search was conducted to identify the locations of international preschools. As there are no registers of international preschools nor any form of database comprising information on preschools' pedagogical orientations, this process was carried out manually by reading the typically self-written descriptions or blurbs of preschools on comparison sites run by the municipalities. In cases where such material was missing or particularly limited, preschools' own websites became the information

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<sup>260</sup> In certain situations, parents may be allowed to access preschools in municipalities where they do not live. However, this not a common practice.

<sup>261</sup> Andreas Alm Fjellborg and Håkan Forsberg, 'Commuting Patterns of Preschool Children in Metropolitan Stockholm', *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 14, no. 4 (2022): 960–80.

source. Due to this process somewhat preceding the study's finalised selection of international preschools, along with the enormity of the task of accessing information on all preschools in the country, it was only those who presented a clear international orientation in the limited material, such as stating their bilingual practices, that were categorised as international.

This undertaking revealed that international preschools were predominantly concentrated within the county of Stockholm, which can be attributed to several factors such as the size of Stockholm's population, the significant presence of private preschool providers (with international preschools being predominantly privately operated), and the city's international character.<sup>262</sup> Regarding the latter, Stockholm is said to be a global city, appearing in several world rankings<sup>263</sup> and marketed as the capital of Scandinavia.<sup>264</sup> It is renowned for its competitive technology sector and is home to numerous large multinational companies and prestigious and globally high-ranking higher education institutions that draw students, researchers, and teachers from around the world. Given this context, Stockholm emerges as an ideal setting for examining how families residing in an internationalised geographic area engage with their local preschool contexts, encompassing international preschools.

One conceivable approach for delimiting the study was to focus solely on the municipality of Stockholm, as this area within the county is home to most international companies, higher education institutions, and international preschools. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the notion of Stockholm transcends these administrative borders. A substantial number of residents in the surrounding municipalities identify themselves as "Stockholmers", living in Stockholm and moving daily between municipal borders.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, international preschools were located in a number of the surrounding municipalities during the initial nationwide search. Consequently, the inclusion of these areas facilitated the study of a more extensive population of families and preschool institutions. The neighbouring municipalities included in the study are Danderyd, Huddinge, Lidingö, Sollentuna, Solna, Sundbyberg, and Täby (See Figure 1). Each has its own specific demographic and reputation, with a number being recognised as more affluent on an average measure. Moreover, their ECEC landscapes are distinct, Täby standing out due to the significant overrepresentation of independent preschools in the municipality.

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<sup>262</sup> Whilst population size is listed as a factor, other large cities had few of these preschools and other smaller cities, such as Lund that is home to a world-ranking university, had greater numbers. This indicates towards the characteristics of the cities and demographics of their populations being influential.

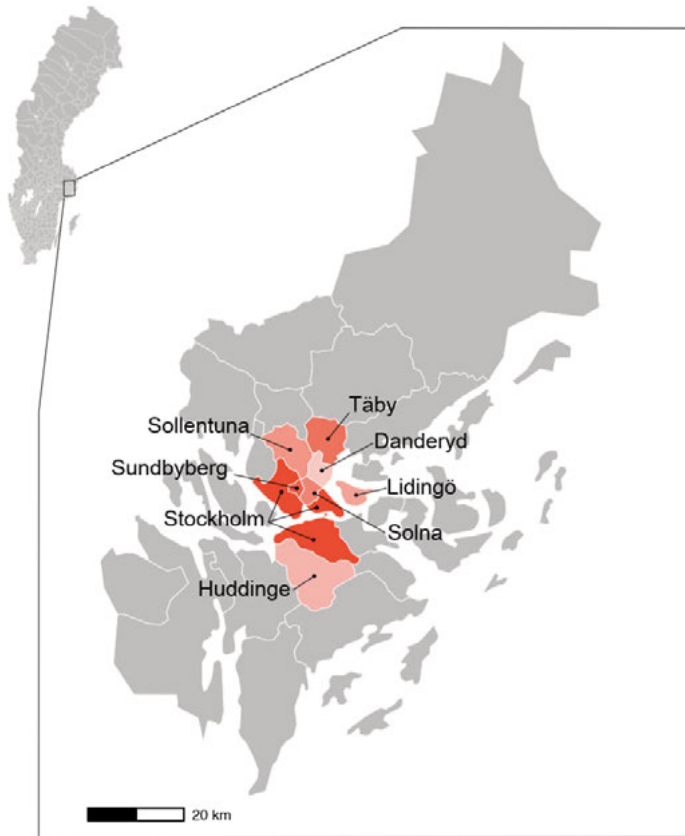
<sup>263</sup> WSP, '2018 WSP Global Cities Index', accessed 1 January 2020, <https://wsp-futurecities.com/>; Mori Memorial Foundation, 'Global Power City Index 2019' (Tokyo, Japan: Institute for Urban Strategies, 2019).

<sup>264</sup> 'Stockholm Business Region', accessed 4 August 2021, <https://www.stockholmbusinessregion.com/sv/>.

<sup>265</sup> For figures regarding commuting patterns see: Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB), 'Antal pendlare per län och kommun, 2019', Statistiska Centralbyrån, accessed 5 August 2021, <http://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik>.



Figure 1. Municipalities in the Stockholm County included in the study.



Sundbyberg was the only selected municipality not home to an international preschool; its inclusion depended solely on its geographic location, as it is situated between other municipalities that were home to international preschools.

The extent to which the entire geographic area is utilised in the thesis varies. In Chapter Five, which captures the objective structures between families with children in preschool, the whole geographic area is encompassed. In later chapters, where the same register data is employed, such as in Chapter Seven, the study population narrows to only those residing in the Stockholm municipality. Regarding the interviews with parents and pedagogical personnel, participant recruitment has been conducted within these geographic areas; however, not all municipalities are represented in the final population.

## A Population of International Preschools

The study of international preschools necessitates a definition of what constitutes membership in this category. As outlined in Chapter Two, ongoing debates surround the classification of international schools. At the preschool level, the absence of clear international and national definitions affords this study the opportunity to adopt a more inductive approach, free from entanglement in definitional disputes and unburdened by national bureaucratic classifications.

The process of identifying international preschools entailed adapting attributes commonly associated with internationality to fit the Swedish preschool context, drawing from the literature on international schools. This process was accomplished by discerning typical forms of internationality, representing general characteristics of internationalisation prevalent among preschools across the country, and subsequently identifying preschools that deviated from this norm. As previously mentioned, an initial nationwide search was conducted based on identifying those preschools with a bilingual profile. This characteristic was chosen due to its clarity as a form of internationality within the Swedish preschool context and its typical inclusion in preschools' short summaries of their provision. Once the geographic area of study was ascertained, a further, more detailed process of pinpointing preschools ensued.

Once again, the predominant source of material consisted of websites, specifically the comparison sites managed by the municipalities and the web pages of preschools. This encompassed approximately 1,095 web pages in Stockholm, 34 in Danderyd, 70 in Täby, 77 in Solna, 106 in Huddinge, 36 in Lidingö, 70 in Sollentuna, and 39 in Sundbyberg. As a number of preschools had ceased operations but had been active during the years covered by the statistical data (2016–2020), information regarding their pedagogical orientation was obtained from alternative online sources<sup>266</sup> or documentation acquired on request from the municipalities' education committees. This latter documentation primarily consisted of paperwork concerning preschools' applications for establishment.<sup>267</sup> Whilst not explicitly presented in the study, the insights gleaned from these materials concerning their pedagogical content, strategies for promoting their provision, and target audience are influential in the analyses as they provide a foundational understanding of the differences between institutions.

In the following section, the characteristics of the preschools chosen for the population are explained in further detail.

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<sup>266</sup> These further documents took the form of out-of-date job advertisements or business plans. When these sources were used, the aim was to use those as close in date to the years 2016–2020. In instances where no information was available, the preschool was removed from the statistical analyses.

<sup>267</sup> Independent preschools are required to apply to their local municipality's education committee for approval of their establishment. This application contains documentation on the planned pedagogical profile, and at times includes transcribed interviews between the prospective owner and education committee administrator. Those preschools that applied for expanded their provision frequently included descriptions of their preschool.

## Forms of Internationality, a Presentation of Preschools

Having a foreign language orientation was a shared characteristic of internationality amongst all the preschools selected based on their promoted provision. Within the geographic area, this made up a population of 92 preschools, of which a few are only international streams or particular classes/groups in preschools.

As foreign language provision is not a part of the Swedish preschool curriculum, other than mother tongue support, the offer of such pedagogical content is a clear expression of a distinct form of internationality. Preschools that only offered mother tongue support were not categorised as international, as their primary focus was on the Swedish language. Neither were those preschools that noted that their staff spoke particular languages, as these gave the impression of being more centred towards coincidental mother tongue support rather than a conscious pedagogical orientation. Amongst those selected were completely bilingual settings<sup>268</sup> and those with a foreign language introduction. This latter category suggested a purposeful pedagogical orientation rather than simple language support.

Amongst the languages offered, the most were English (61 with strong/bilingual profiles and 12 with weak/introduction), with other languages being Estonian (1), French (5), German (1), Greek (2), Spanish (1), and Somali (10).<sup>269</sup> A number of preschools have undergone changes concerning their language provision, which was highlighted by comparing the material sources. Some presented more defined language profiles in the materials accessed from the municipalities' educational authorities,<sup>270</sup> compared to that they promoted on their current websites. In these instances, preschools were still included in the population as their reputations as language profiles prevailed, which was evidenced within the interviews with staff and parents of children attending them; they still perceived them as being bilingual or having language profiles.

In addition to possessing foreign language orientations, each institution promoted its own distinct form of internationality. Certain characteristics were found to be shared amongst some preschools. For example, some use their names as markers for their international provision, either adopting nation-specific terms such as “nursery school”, or using the word “international”. There are 24 preschools in the selected municipalities that call themselves international, the majority of which do so in English, such as Harmony International Preschool<sup>271</sup> and Futuraskolan International<sup>272</sup> (who run a chain of preschools). However, a couple of others, such as Eudora Internationella Förskola,<sup>273</sup> use the Swedish language concerning the word for international and for preschool.

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<sup>268</sup> As well as those that were solely English-speaking that will be addressed shortly.

<sup>269</sup> One preschool is split into two as they offer two streams of different languages.

<sup>270</sup> Materials accessed were as close as possible to the years of available statistical data (2016-2020).

<sup>271</sup> ‘Harmony International Preschool’, accessed 23 February 2024,

<http://www.harmonypreschool.se/>.

<sup>272</sup> ‘Futuraskolan International’, Futuraskolan, accessed 23 February 2024, <https://futraskolan.se/>.

<sup>273</sup> ‘Eudora Internationella Förskola’, accessed 23 February 2024, <https://www.eudoraforskola.se/>.

Within the population of international preschools, two divergent organisational forms exist: those belonging to the publicly funded sector and those operating outside this arena, influencing preschools' specific forms of internationality. Only two institutions operate outside of the publicly funded sector. They are particularly distinct as they are not preschools in the juridical sense (however, they will be termed so for ease of writing). They belong to fee-charging international schools, The British International School (BISS)<sup>274</sup> and The Stockholm International School (SIS)<sup>275</sup>. They do not receive public funding and instead take fees to cover their provision. As they can be said to exist outside of the educational system, these preschools are not subject to requirements placed on other preschools, and they, therefore, only accept children from the age of three and have neither the Swedish language nor Swedish curriculum as an integral part of their provision. There are three other preschools that are associated with free-charging international schools; however, these are part of the publicly funded system and thus adhere to regulations concerning the use of the Swedish curriculum and do not solely use a foreign language. They are affiliated with the schools: Tanto International School, The German School (Tyska skolan), and the French International School (Lycée Français Saint Louis de Stockholm). In the same order of their schools the preschools are called: The English Nursery, Kindergarten (Tyska skolans förskola, Kindergarten), and Lycée Français Saint Louis preschool (Lycée Français Saint Louis förskola).<sup>276</sup>

The final characteristic of internationality found to be shared by twelve of the preschools chosen due to their language orientation is their use of a non-Swedish curriculum. All publicly funded preschools must follow the Swedish curriculum but there are no regulations regarding the simultaneous use of a further curriculum. The majority of preschools run by Futuraskolan International implement the International Early Years Curriculum (IEYC).<sup>277</sup> Lilla Europaskolan followed<sup>278</sup> the IB Primary Years Programme,<sup>279</sup> and Eudora, who whilst in its establishment, planned to employ the IB Primary Years Programme,<sup>280</sup> today offers an "interpretation" of the Swedish curriculum.<sup>281</sup> The English Nursery, which in the early 2000s followed a version of the British curriculum<sup>282</sup> at present-day, promotes only their use of the Swedish. Again, this rings true at Lycée Français Saint Louis

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<sup>274</sup> 'British International School of Stockholm', accessed 23 February 2024, <https://bisstockholm.se/>.

<sup>275</sup> 'Stockholm International School', accessed 23 February 2024, <https://stockholmis.se/>.

<sup>276</sup> 'Tyska Skolan', accessed 8 May 2020, <https://tyskaskolan.se/>; 'Tanto International School', accessed 23 February 2024, <https://www.tantoschool.se/>; 'Lycée Français Saint Louis de Stockholm', accessed 24 February 2024, <https://www.lfsl.net/>.

<sup>277</sup> For details of this curriculum see: 'International Early Years Curriculum', accessed 13 May 2021, <https://internationalcurriculum.com>.

<sup>278</sup> It has since ceased trading.

<sup>279</sup> For details of this curriculum see 'Primary Years Programme (PYP)', accessed 13 May 2021, <https://www.ibo.org>.

<sup>280</sup> Stockholms Stad, 'Ärende 13-453/428', 2013, Stockholms Stad Utbildningsnämnden.

<sup>281</sup> 'Om Eudora/About Eudora - Eudora Internationella Förskola', accessed 13 May 2021, <https://www.eudoraforskola.se>.

<sup>282</sup> Stockholms Stad, 'Ärende 09-454/737', 2011, Stockholms Stad Utbildningsnämnden.

preschool, which previously had a more substantial French curriculum input than it currently has. Highlighting both preschools that currently follow an international or another country's curriculum, as well as those that have previously done so is of interest to the study, as whilst the latter groups' use of non-Swedish curricula has ceased, reputation often pursues and even if the curriculum is currently downplayed the preschool may well be known for their particular working style.

## Studying Social Structures through Register Data

One of the aims of this thesis is to comprehend the social recruitment dynamics to international preschools. To achieve this goal, in Chapter Five, the study utilises an approach that situates these families and preschools within the wider social context of all participants in the localised preschool landscape. Through this lens, the study uses Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to uncover the objective structures that emerge due to the uneven distribution of capital and social characteristics among families. MCA belongs to the family of Geometric Data Analysis (GDA), and through this method, the numerous social characteristics of families are examined simultaneously, and the patterns within the distribution of these characteristics among families are geometrically mapped onto a multidimensional space.<sup>283</sup> This space, which captures the hierarchies and distinctions between families, serves as the foundation for the analysis of enrolment patterns among different preschools.

Families' social characteristics, which predominantly concern the parents, are built on individual-level register data ordered from Statistics Sweden (SCB).<sup>284</sup> The characteristics chosen for study within the MCA in Chapter Five, are those which provide measures for studying social class and also distinctions within classes. With a specific emphasis on international preschools, migration-related attributes are included. Specific details concerning the use of the individual register data in the creation of the space are presented in Chapter Five, along with further information regarding the method itself.

The MCA serves multiple purposes within the thesis. As the analysis captures the outcomes of parents' choices, where they enrol their children in preschool, it shows how volumes and composition of capital – families' specific social characteristics – translate into preschool enrolment patterns, capturing the results of their encounters with the preschool landscape independently of what may be the subjective side of these choices. Additionally, it sheds light on the various manifestations of internationality amongst preschools by illuminating each international preschool's social position within the social hierarchies and distinctions

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<sup>283</sup> See Brigitte Le Roux and Henry Rouanet, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis* (London: Sage, 2010).

<sup>284</sup> The databases used are: Longitudinal integrated database for health insurance and labour market studies (LISA), Total Population Register (RTB), Geography Database (GDB), Pre-school: Children and staff per 15 October.

of families. Moreover, the MCA functions as a means to comprehend the social contexts of families by showing the objective structures within which they and their preschool choices are embedded. In this sense, the MCA serves as a framework for the interviews. While many of the interviewees may be encompassed within the MCA, their individual positions remain indistinguishable. However, by integrating the sociological information gleaned from the interviews into the MCA,<sup>285</sup> their positions can be visualised within the multidimensional space. This provides a backdrop for the analysis of the interviews, as it presents the specific social positions of the families along with the positions of the preschools they chose in relation to other families and preschools. Although not always explicitly stated, the findings of the MCA are utilised throughout the entire study.

In addition to the MCA, the individual-level register data is used in further instances within the thesis, which are discussed in the text. For example, in Chapter Seven, the geographic database is employed to analyse commuting patterns between families' residences and their children's preschools. To maintain confidentiality, SCB does not provide the exact coordinates. Instead, the coordinates represent the bottom left point of a 250-square-meter area within which families reside or preschools are located.

## A Relational Approach to Interviews

The analysis of the register data in Chapter Five reveals the objective structures among families. Unable to be captured through an analysis of such material are the subjectivities of individuals, the mental structures that are reproduced. By interviewing according to a relational approach, the study explores how families, embedded in objective social structures, present their practices, identities, emotions, moral beliefs, systems of classification, and forms of symbolic boundaries,<sup>286</sup> all of which contribute to the study of their dispositions. In essence, the interviews were designed to capture the perspectives of parents from their unique social positions that are characterised by their own set of constraints and opportunities, with a focus on how they value and manage characteristics of internationality in their family lives and encounters with the preschool landscape. By altering the focus from studying the generalised patterns of preschool enrolment captured through the analysis of register data to turning attention to individuals, light can be shed on the diversity within social groups.<sup>287</sup> This approach allows for illuminating the workings of specific constellations of capital.

The interviews are guided by the same aims as the statistical analysis, exploring the relationships between families and international preschools in their preschool

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<sup>285</sup> Aside from income, which was calculated in regards the national averages of their occupations.

<sup>286</sup> Michèle Lamont and Ann Swidler, 'Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing', *Qualitative Sociology* 37, no. 2 (2014): 153–71.

<sup>287</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice*, 60.

contexts. However, the interviews explore how parents resonate about their choices, and the analysis embeds these choice practices within families' wider contexts, both their current social situations and their pasts. In essence, this particular approach to interviews aims to understand what is said from interviewees' "points of view".<sup>288</sup> As well as comprehending their points of view from the interviews themselves, through contextualising their positions in light of their narratives, the MCA analysis, as discussed, provides a further empirical understanding as to where these individuals stand within social structures.

A difference between the relations studied in the MCA and the interviews is that the interviews not only examine families as units. The interviews provide the opportunity to study how the composition of assets within families, such as languages, occupations, and migration histories, relate to their preschool choices. Essentially, the interviews allow for the exploration of families as their own relational spaces. By adopting this approach, the dynamics of families and their internal social structures, which intersect with broader social structures, become an additional level of analysis concerning how families navigate the process of raising their children and their choices of preschool within this context.

### Recruiting Parents

The interviews aimed to engage with parents of children attending various preschools, with the goal of exploring both the diversity in foreign language offerings represented in the preschool landscape and the variation among families that choose them. Given the understanding that families with Swedish backgrounds and those with foreign backgrounds often attend these preschools, it was deemed that using the preschools as the communication route to parents would attract a more diverse range of participants than attempting to recruit participants through other avenues. The method for recruiting participants was altered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the early stage of the project, the plan had been to contact parents directly through visits to the preschools. However, only two visits were achievable before recommendations and restrictions were implemented.

For this reason, most participants were recruited by email; managers of preschools sent out a "call for participants" letter, which asked families to make contact if they were interested. In this letter, the study was framed as focusing on preschools with a language or international orientation. The emphasis on language was a strategy to prevent families who did not identify with the term international feeling that the study was not relevant to them. In the call for participants, a number of themes for the interview were listed, which included: choice of preschool (how did you choose, what were your criteria? Was the language aspect important?), general views on preschool, early childcare and parenting, mobility (have you moved countries before?), perceptions on

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<sup>288</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'To the Reader', in *The Weight of the World Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1–2.

languages (are languages important to you? What languages do you want your child to learn?), plans for later school choice.

These themes, along with the mention that interviews could be carried out in either English or Swedish, aimed to demonstrate that the study was not only interested in engaging with families that were particularly focused on international education. However, despite these efforts, the majority of those who came forward tended to have strong connections to foreign countries. There were few families composed of two Swedish parents. Even among these Swedish families, it was common for one parent to have a non-Swedish background, or they themselves had lived abroad. This recruitment method had clear implications for social class. The respondents who answered the call for participants were predominantly middle-class families. As a result, the interview study was unable to capture a broader diversity in terms of social class.

Due to the pandemic, many preschools were not willing to send out the call for participants letter to parents. It was a time of unrest, and preschools needed to ensure that the only information they were sending via their internal channels was of uppermost importance – that which concerned the ongoing pandemic. For this reason, a number of preschools deemed pertinent to the study expressed their inability to participate. Thus, while the language profiles provided by preschools served as the starting point for accessing a variation in internationality,<sup>289</sup> this proved challenging when only one or two institutions offered a specific language. Consequently, the languages offered by the preschools the interviewees' children attended tended to be the most accessible due to their numbers.

Families at English international preschools are well represented, reflecting the greater number of these institutions that were available for contact. The same can be said for French and Somali preschools. However, social class also played a role here. For instance, several parents had children who either currently attend or had previously attended multiple international preschools. In many cases, these preschools were predominantly English-speaking. However, there were also instances where children attended both English and French preschools, which are considered symbolically valuable languages. Interviewing these parents expanded the scope of preschools included in the study, although it often encompassed socially similar preschools in terms of recruitment. The preschools attended by the interviewees can be found in Appendix B.<sup>290</sup> Names are not given for preschools, but the appendix provides details of their social recruitment and the languages they offer.

In a couple of cases, the rector of preschools contacted provided a short list of individuals willing to be involved, asking parents themselves rather than circulating the call for participants letter. This method had a notable result; these parents seemed to be particularly active parents in the preschool, demonstrating

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<sup>289</sup> However, to limit the scope, it was decided to focus only on those with stronger language profiles; in particular, those with only an introduction to English were excluded from the interviews.

<sup>290</sup> Only sixteen of the eighteen preschools appear in this appendix as two were not encompassed within the available register data. The two missing preschools are those fee-charging settings.



extensive knowledge of child development and strong opinions on early years pedagogy. A further strategy employed to recruit participants involved utilising a snowball effect. This approach helped expand the pool of participants within the same preschool and extended to their broader social networks, whose children attended different international preschools. Moreover, this allowed for studying families that were socially similar but made different preschool choices.

However, it should be noted that, once again, there were clear implications for capturing social class differences. The families who responded to the call for participants and were subsequently included in the snowball effect tended to reinforce this middle-class bias, particularly in the representation of middle-class parents who were either foreign-born or had a foreign-born partner. It should be highlighted that although the study aimed to capture families residing in different socio-geographic areas, this was not fully achieved. Participants from less affluent areas were few, with the majority residing in the city centre, affluent neighbouring municipalities, or middle-class or mixed suburbs.

Of the final 36 interviews, 18 preschools were represented, with multiple parents having children who attended more than one preschool. The majority of parents (30) had children who attended one of twelve English-speaking preschools. Eight had children in one of four French preschools, and two were enrolled at one of two Somali preschools.<sup>291</sup>

## Interview Occasions and Content

The interviews followed a loose guide comprising numerous topics (See Appendix C). Each topic was covered in every interview; however, the questions asked were specific to the interview occasion and fitting to the individual conversation. This gave the interviewees the opportunity to discuss aspects of their lives and their encounters with preschools that they deemed relevant, an approach employed to understand parents *vis-à-vis* their social worlds.

Prior to the pandemic, interviews took place in person at a time and location chosen by the interviewee. This was either their workplace, home, or a café in their local vicinity. Encouraging parents to choose the location of their interview had numerous benefits. Firstly, they were able to select an environment that was both practical and in which they felt comfortable. Furthermore, the location was, at times, able to provide some initial information on the interviewee regarding their employment, practices, taste, or geographic belonging. In these face-to-face meetings, the parents often opened up, talking in detail about their lives, views, backgrounds, and experiences. In one instance, an interviewee invited their friend, a previously interviewed parent, to join for part of the interview. This

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<sup>291</sup> Note that these numbers exceed the 36 interviews due to parents having children who either attended different international preschools or had children who had previously attended another international preschool.

resulted in an opportunity for the interviewees to discuss and compare their experiences and practices with each other.

While the preference was for all interviews to take place face-to-face, once the pandemic and regulations regarding social contact and travel were clearly not going to subside in the near future, the decision was made to interview digitally. After having attained such rich material from the face-to-face interviews, the switch to digital interviews was carried out with trepidation. Whilst there are clear difficulties with digital communication, such as the lack of intimacy, inability to read body language,<sup>292</sup> and upholding the intricacy of dialogue and social interactions due to the more rigid borders of whose turn it is to speak (transcripts of face-to-face interviews evidence how often speech can overlap), it was surprisingly comfortable to carry out interviews in this format. It was clear that most participants were used to communicating in this form; many had family in other countries that they spoke to frequently online. A few individuals had their cameras switched off. One explained they planned to take a walk at the same time, and others could be heard carrying out household chores. Despite missing out on visible contact, these interviews still felt quite natural. On a general level, however, the fact that the majority of the interviews took place digitally created a limitation to the study. The material evidences that the face-to-face interviews seemed to achieve a better rapport between researcher and interviewee and provide more appropriate excerpts for the presentation of analysis.

When parents made initial contact to offer their contribution to the project, they typically included a brief description of their family situation. This information was often utilised to begin the interviews, e.g. “you mentioned that you were from Australia, how did you end up in Sweden?”. If nothing was known of the participants in advance, the interviews typically began by asking them to briefly describe their situation. These questions provided parents with the opportunity to freely describe aspects of their lives that they deemed important, typically regarding their choice of an international preschool. Simultaneously, these descriptions revealed sociological clues for understanding their social worlds. The social characteristics of parents and families were paramount to the analysis, but questions concerning these were woven into the interview as naturally as possible. More detailed questions regarding their backgrounds were addressed towards the end of the interview if needed.

The interviews tended to be approximately 1.5 hours long, although some were shorter and a handful extended beyond that, with one lasting three hours. The interviews took place in either English or Swedish, with the language spoken typically being that the parents used when making initial contact (typically via email). My (Jenny) British nationality was typically unknown to interviewees before our conversations. In a number of the interviews that took place in English, it was apparent that non-Swedish parents assumed I was Swedish, apologising for

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<sup>292</sup> Sally Seitz, ‘Pixilated Partnerships, Overcoming Obstacles in Qualitative Interviews via Skype: A Research Note’, *Qualitative Research* 16, no. 2 (2016): 229–35.

their comments about Sweden. At this point, I informed them of my nationality. In other interviews, non-Swedish parents knew immediately from my accent and were often interested in how long I had been in Sweden, if I could speak Swedish, etc. In these instances, it became clear that these parents perceived me as being in a similar position to themselves.

## Interview Analysis

The process of analysing the interviews commenced during the interviews themselves as the situation required a continual sociological interpretation. However, the primary analytical work predominantly occurred after the interviews were concluded. Guiding the analysis is the perspective that how individuals resonate about their practices and beliefs are framed by their social worlds. This encompasses their backgrounds, assets, past experiences, present circumstances, and family dynamics. In essence, the analytical process was a thematic analysis with the social characteristics and positions of the interviewees as the model of explanation. The analytical process involved gaining as holistic an understanding of each interviewed parent as possible. The process involved transcribing the interviews in their entirety and reading and re-reading them, searching for both consistencies and contradictions in their utterances. The aim here was not to bring doubt to their stories but to gain a more detailed understanding of the nuances in how they described their lives, which do not always follow a stable logic.<sup>293</sup> This was especially important as the interviews frequently moved between topics due to their semi-structured nature. In essence, the analysis involved understanding each utterance within the context of the entire interview, avoiding any fragmentation.

The interviews were analysed in relation to one another, searching for themes in the accounts of the interviewees as well as recurring ways of thinking.<sup>294</sup> All transcripts were loaded into the same document organiser software, LiquidText, which enabled swift movement between transcripts. Moreover, this software included a workspace where excerpts from all interviews could be lifted and notes written. Of particular use was the software's function of linking excerpts to one another and their place in the transcripts. This feature allowed for shifting between interviews, re-reading, and enabling a comparison process between the interviews. The comparison of interviews involved searching for differences and similarities, focusing on capturing the workings of species of capital and identifying parents' possibilities and limitations in activating their capital.<sup>295</sup> As themes arose from the material, these were developed and questioned, again re-reading the transcripts and attempting to find nuances and reasons for them.

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<sup>293</sup> Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson, *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method* (London: SAGE, 2000), 70–72.

<sup>294</sup> See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

<sup>295</sup> Annette Lareau and Erin McNamara Horvat, 'Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships', *Sociology of Education* 72, no. 1 (1999): 37–53.

To keep each individual's specific social characteristics, past experiences, and situations to the fore of the analysis, interview data was also turned into a basic matrix. This document was used like an encyclopaedia of the interviewees. Citations from the interviews are presented in a number of ways in the chapters. More extended citations are linked to specific individuals, and shorter ones are built into the text to provide either snapshots of general ways of thinking or are contextualised to specific interviewees.

## Presentation of Interviewed Families

Interviews with parents were carried out in 2019–2021. They consist of 36 interviews, four of which were with two parents (mother and father). Six of the 31 interviews with one parent were fathers, meaning that of the 36, ten included fathers.<sup>296</sup> The overrepresentation of mothers is not so surprising as mothers are shown to frequently be the primary caregivers and predominantly lead the search for ECEC. Most of the parents were part of two-parent households, and the majority can be categorised as middle class, measured by their education level and occupation, as well as through more nuanced information on their lives and their projected position in the MCA analysis (see Appendix D). Moreover, information about their parents was also typically collected, which allowed for understanding how stable their class positions were. However, as many of the families came from other countries, it was not entirely possible to appreciate the meaning of their resources in their national contexts. For this reason, class backgrounds only consider parents (i.e. children's grandparents) when deemed rigorous. All but two families had at least one parent with higher education. However, even amongst these highly educated families, there are some symbolic differences; some gained their higher education degree in preschool teaching or social work, whilst others in health, marketing, and finance. The level of higher education spanned from bachelor's to PhD. There was an overrepresentation of parents working in the private sector, particularly within the tech and finance industries.

Of particular interest to the study was parents' international attributes. The parents had a broad range of national backgrounds, covering the continents of Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and South America. A few of the families comprised two Swedish-born parents (with and without parents born in foreign countries), some comprised two parents from the same country, others were made up of two foreign parents from different countries, and there was a number of families where one parent was Swedish and the other foreign. All the families had some form of cross-border mobility in their background, even if this varied in scope. Some had grown up in families that had moved countries once or multiple times. Others had become frequent international movers as adults, and for some, their move to Sweden was their first instance of living in a new country. In most cases, employment or study opportunities had driven or enabled their moves.

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<sup>296</sup> Appendix E: Parent Participants.

A further aspect distinguishing families is how long they had lived in Sweden. Some parents were born in the country and had not resided long-term in another country. However, for others, the length of time they had lived in Sweden differed from a few weeks to thirty years. A table breaking down the interview participants and their aggregated social characteristics can be found in Appendix E. Within this table, the named individuals (with aliases utilised) are those who participated in the interview. The other parents in the families who did not engage in the interview are denoted as “Parent 2”. Nationalities are aggregated into regions in this table, though specific nationalities are named in certain instances throughout the thesis. The table also provides insights into parents’ educational backgrounds, aggregated occupations,<sup>297</sup> and transnational characteristics. These transnational attributes are further delineated into two categories: those inherited from childhood and those acquired as adults. Parents are assessed on a relative scale of weak, medium, or strong regarding these transnational attributes. This system captures various factors such as international migration history, frequency of moves, upbringing in bilingual households, and experiences of studying abroad. These categories are not referred to within the chapters but are intrinsic to the analyses.

### A Complementary Population of Pedagogic Personnel

Alongside the interviews with parents, twelve interviews with pedagogical personnel working in international preschools were carried out. These include both managers and qualified and unqualified staff members. These interviews, whilst following the same theoretical perspective, followed a separate interview guide (Appendix F) and had a different focus. The aim of the interviews was to understand, from the staff’s perspective, the preschool context within which international schools are situated.

The interviews with staff grew to have a less prominent part in the project as it developed. Instead, they were used for gaining an understanding of the types of practices and beliefs that are found among staff within international preschools, which became more important as restrictions regarding visits to preschools were implemented. For the most part, they illustrate the perspective of the staff in regard to their specific form of provision in comparison to other preschools in the preschool market. In this sense, they give a glimpse into what happens within the preschools, meaning that analyses regarding the type of pedagogical content do not rely solely on accounts from parents and the preschools’ promotional materials.

Amongst these pedagogic personnel, only three were born in Sweden. Of these three, two had parents with foreign backgrounds. The foreign-born personnel had particularly mobile lives; they have lived in numerous countries. The interviewees come from or have lived in the United Kingdom, Canada, Greece,

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<sup>297</sup> For non-working parents, their most recent occupation is provided.

Brazil, Russia, India, Mexico, Italy, and Vietnam. They differed in the time they had lived in Sweden, ranging from two and a half to twenty years.<sup>298</sup>

Regarding the types of preschools the personnel worked at, three are employed at fee-charging preschools attached to international schools. All others worked at publicly funded but privately run preschools with some form of international profile. The interviews with those at the fee-charging preschools are of particular use as these institutions are missing from the statistical analyses. Amongst the publicly funded preschools represented, most have English language orientations, with the other language profile being Somali.

## Ethical Considerations

Throughout all stages of the study, ethical considerations have been made to ensure the integrity of individuals, whether this be those present in the register data or those interviewed. Moreover, the conditions laid out in the General Data Protection Regulation have been upheld.<sup>299</sup>

Individual-level register data provided by Statistics Sweden (SCB) was subjected to their internal anonymity tests and provided pseudonymised with serial numbers replacing true identification numbers. Due to the extensiveness of the data, care was taken to avoid using the information in any way that could identify an individual. Certain variables were provided aggregated, such as individuals' birth country, which is grouped into larger geographic areas.<sup>300</sup>

In contrast to the statistical data, the interview data included knowledge of the individuals' identities, not least as they were required to complete consent forms that included their names and contact details. However, interviewees were given aliases, as were any other individuals they mentioned. The keys between their pseudonymised transcripts and their identities are stored on a secure server provided by Uppsala University that meets the requirement of GDPR with an Information Security Classification Value of 332 (KRT 332). Further to pseudonymisation, an ethical priority has been made to ensure that the information presented in the thesis does not culminate to enable any individual's identification. This has involved providing only necessary information on families and broadening specific details. For this reason, the gender of children is altered throughout the thesis, meaning that excerpts are at times edited so that "he" becomes "she" and vice versa. The same parent may, therefore, seem to discuss their child in both feminine and masculine forms. A similar process has taken place regarding the number of children that parents have. This is more pertinent in the descriptions of families, in which families

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<sup>298</sup> As these staff are used as informants, detailed information regarding them as individuals is not provided.

<sup>299</sup> European Union, 'Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation)' (2016).

<sup>300</sup> Information on anonymity of microdata can be found at Statistiska Centralbyrån, accessed 9 August 2021, <http://www.scb.se/>.

are referred to as having only one child in instances where having multiple children is not relevant to the presentation of the analysis.

As the interviews contain a wealth of information about families' backgrounds and daily lives, a level of aggregation has sometimes been needed regarding their nationalities, languages spoken, occupations, countries lived in, etc. Languages are strongly associated with countries, albeit in many cases shared between several nations. Considerations have been made concerning the information provided about each family, concerning the area of the world they are from and the language they speak. However, in many instances, naming their country of origin does not endanger their identification. In certain instances, the names of parents are omitted from the presentation of the analysis.

All interviewees were provided with information about the project prior to the interview and filled in a consent form. They were informed of their right to retract their participation before the dissertation is published. As preschools were the point of contact for recruiting participants, as was a snowball effect, there is a possibility that those participating in the project or working at the preschools may be able to decipher the participants' identities. This is a well-established problem with qualitative research methods and the presented analyses have attempted to counteract this as much as possible. Concerning preschools, the naming of individual institutions is avoided in instances where interviewees could be identified. In the statistical analyses, whilst names are not used for preschools, certain characteristics, such as their language offer, can identify some preschools. However, this does not enable the identification of individuals.

Finally, a specific ethical consideration for the interviews has been how to present these personal conversations to an audience of readers.<sup>301</sup> The interview situation was built on a level of trust, as parents shared stories of their lives and perspectives, and it is important that this trust is upheld. Thus, as guided by the theoretical perspective of understanding individuals' subjectivities as framed by their social viewpoint, emphasis has been placed on not misinterpreting or misunderstanding their point of view.

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<sup>301</sup> Bourdieu writes of the researcher's ethical dilemma of making 'private words public' Bourdieu, 'The Weight of the World', 1.





## Preschools in a Social Space of Families

International preschools, like international schools, are intrinsically linked to national educational systems and local educational landscapes. These institutions gain meaning through their unique characteristics that set them apart from those without international orientations, offering more general internationalised educational experiences.<sup>302</sup> International schools are commonly associated with particular social groups and fractions, notably affluent middle-class and elite groups who exhibit either realised or aspired cross-border mobility.<sup>303</sup> However, it is the intersection of these social characteristics and the particularities of educational markets and geographic contexts within which families reside that shape educational choices.<sup>304</sup> Thus, studying parents' choice of international preschool for their young children demands placing these educational practices within the social hierarchies and objective structures underlying their local preschool landscape. This chapter's purpose and contribution, which compares enrolment patterns in international preschools to the wider preschool landscape, is to show how the social characteristics of families in these preschools relate to class hierarchies and social distinctions among all families with children attending preschool. The chapter diverges from a specific focus on particular social groups often explored in studies on international education. Instead, it takes the local preschool landscape as its point of departure, serving as the context for families' preschool choice practices.

Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) forms the basis of the analysis, a method that captures, in a multidimensional geometric space, patterns in the constellations of social characteristics held by families<sup>305</sup> – their educational level and track, income level, migration histories, age, and employment sector. Subsequently, individual preschools, international and non-international, are highlighted in this space,<sup>306</sup> showing their social position in relation to the social structures between families. Thus, the approach illuminates how the intersection of families' social characteristics and internationality manifests in the preschool sector and translates into localised educational choices for young children.

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<sup>302</sup> Igarashi and Saito, 'Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital'.

<sup>303</sup> E.g. Ball and Nikita, 'The Global Middle Class and School Choice'; Hayden and Thompson, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'.

<sup>304</sup> Windle and Maire, 'Beyond the Global City'; Breidenstein et al., 'Choosing International: A Case Study of Globally Mobile Parents'.

<sup>305</sup> See Le Roux and Rouanet, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis*.

<sup>306</sup> According to the mean point of the families that attend them.

The chapter is organised as follows. It begins by presenting information on the data, the formation of family units, and the social characteristics under study. Following this, it examines the structures in the distribution of social characteristics among families as captured through the interpretation of the axes of the space. Subsequently, attention turns to the preschools. International preschools are compared to non-international preschools, and differences between individual institutions and particular language offers are discussed.

## Families and their Social Characteristics

The unequal distribution of social characteristics amongst families forms the objective structures between them – the hierarchies and distinctions that determine their social positions. Within the analysis, families are constructed as units; their combined social characteristics are the point of comparison to other families.<sup>307</sup> What constitutes a family is a complex question; there is an endless array of configurations involving parents, step-parents, and other significant adults who can collectively raise a child. However, the available data does not capture the daily realities of how individuals construct and arrange their families. Considering that a significant majority of preschool-aged children reside with both their parents,<sup>308</sup> this has been the foundation for creating family units; families are constructed by including two parents,<sup>309</sup> who are either biological or adoptive.<sup>310</sup>

In instances where families had multiple children enrolled in preschool, the sibling with the most recent start date at preschool was selected. This decision prevented the same family from appearing more than once in the dataset, thereby minimising the potential for skewing enrolment patterns and keeping the focus on parents rather than children. Opting to retain the most recent registration is presumed to better capture families' deliberate choices as many municipalities utilise a queue system, with families often receiving a place at less preferred preschools while waiting to secure their desired ones.<sup>311</sup> Ensuring the dataset solely comprises unique families avoids inadvertently reinforcing specific choice patterns. Given that families commonly select the same preschool for their successive children, the focus on unique families contributes to a more accurate representation of reality.

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<sup>307</sup> Within MCA a space is built based on statistical individuals. In the case of this analysis, the statistical individuals are family units.

<sup>308</sup> Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB), *Barn, föräldrar och separationer: utvecklingen under 2000-talet*, Demografiska rapporter, 2013,1 (Örebro: SCB, 2013).

<sup>309</sup> The absence of data on one parent is the only circumstance under which family units consist of a single adult

<sup>310</sup> In cases where information on both biological and adoptive parents was available, the adoptive parent/s were given precedence. The available data is limited to only one mother and father per child.

<sup>311</sup> Younger siblings, due to their priority placement in preschools attended by their older siblings, are more likely to secure admission to the preferred preschool from the outset.

The population comprises 55,951 unique families that resided in the studied geographical area and had a child<sup>312</sup> that attended preschool in 2016–2020.<sup>313</sup> There are instances where a parent from one family also appears in another family unit. Of the 55,762 mothers, 188 appear more than once (for all but one of these 188, they appear in two family units, and one mother exists in three). Of the 55,781 fathers, 166 appear more than once, with four individuals as part of three family units. Including additional observations of specific individuals does not necessarily lead to the duplication of their characteristics, as family units are formed based on both parents.<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, since the number of these repeated individuals is relatively small, it was deemed more rigorous for the analysis to retain these observations than removing half-siblings.

Families can possess a near-infinite number of social characteristics, some of which are more influential in their life possibilities and cultural practices than others. Hence, the social characteristics investigated in this chapter have been selected for their sociological relevance. Whilst they represent only a subset of attributes that characterise families, they hold significance in capturing patterns of similarity, distinction, and dominance. Moreover, they build on social characteristics frequently associated with families' tendency to opt for international educational pathways for their children. However, it should be noted that as the analysis relies on data from the available register databases, the characteristics of families are constrained to the information contained within these sources. The characteristics chosen are income level, educational level, educational track, sector of employment, mother's age, and date of most recent immigration. These characteristics (variables) are broken down into relevant categories for the analysis. They are presented in Table 1, along with figures corresponding to the numbers and percentage of families in each category.

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<sup>312</sup> They may have had more than one child, but in the data this is limited to one.

<sup>313</sup> Children did not need to have been enrolled for the entirety of these years.

<sup>314</sup> Regarding education, for instance, the parent with the highest level of education is considered to represent the family's educational level. Thus, if a parent belongs to two different family units, they may have the higher education level in one family unit and not in the other.

Table 1. Families' social characteristics, active variables and categories.

Variable	Category	N	%
Income	Low	4,501	8.0
	Mid-Low	11,132	19.9
	Mid	22,985	41.1
	Mid-High	11,552	20.6
	High	5,781	10.3
Education Level	Compulsory & Upper-secondary	14,409	25.8
	Post-secondary no HE	8,808	15.7
	HE <= 4 years	26,317	47.0
	HE > 4 years	6,417	11.5
Education Track	Admin & Economy	8,460	15.1
	Health, Service, & Social Care	11,269	20.1
	Humanities & Social Science	16,057	28.7
	Natural Science & Engineering	13,616	24.3
	<i>Agriculture &amp; Animals</i>	581	1.0
	<i>General Education</i>	5,108	9.1
	<i>Missing</i>	860	1.5
Immigration	Never	22,834	40.8
	Before 2005	7,297	13.0
	2005-2013	9,332	16.7
	Recent	3,439	6.1
	<i>Missing</i>	13,049	23.3
Employment Sector	Private	35,637	63.9
	Public	15,704	28.1
	<i>Missing</i>	4,610	8.2
Mothers Age	Younger	11,412	20.4
	Mid	29,600	52.9
	Older	10,915	19.5
	<i>Missing</i>	4,024	7.2
Variables: 6	Active Categories: 22	Total individuals: 55,951	

The *Income* variable is divided into five categories<sup>315</sup> created using both parents' disposable incomes.<sup>316</sup> The mean income of both parents was calculated using their registered income the year of their child's preschool enrolment, and the two years previous.<sup>317</sup> A mean of these figures created a family income variable that was grouped into high, mid-high, mid, mid-low, and low. *Educational Level* (Ed Level) corresponds to the highest educational level of the family unit in the year their child was enrolled at preschool.<sup>318</sup> This is grouped into the levels: compulsory & upper secondary, post-secondary but not higher education, higher education four years and under, and higher education over four years.

Vertical hierarchies may be less evident when it comes to families' educational track and employment sector (i.e. working in the public or private sector). However, these attributes can illuminate differences in dispositions and horizontal differentiations that intersect with class hierarchies. Moreover, school choice and

<sup>315</sup> Missing information is made into a passive category meaning it is not effectual in building the space. Johs. Hjelldrekk, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis for the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2018), 57.

<sup>316</sup> Aggregating incomes and calculating a mean for the family provides the economic realities of the family's situation. These combined economic resources play a significant role in determining factors such as housing, consumption. See Max Thaning and Martin Hällsten, 'The End of Dominance? Evaluating Measures of Socio-Economic Background in Stratification Research', *European Sociological Review* 36, no. 4 (2020): 533–47.

<sup>317</sup> Those who enrolled in 2020 lacked register data concerning income (and education). This group's median income was calculated for the years 2017–2019.

<sup>318</sup> Or the year before in the case of those enrolling in 2020.

preschool choice patterns are shown to differ between those belonging to the different sectors, notably higher up the social hierarchy, patterns which extend to choices for international education.<sup>319</sup> Families' *Education Track* (Ed Track), like *Employment Sector* (Employment Sector), is generally that of the parent with the highest registered educational level.<sup>320</sup> In instances where both parents possess the same level of education, which is the case for 14.8 percent of the families, priority has been given to the mothers. The argument for this is that mothers are shown to take the lead in childcare responsibilities and the organisation of preschool arrangements for their young children.<sup>321</sup> Since the analysis aims to gain a sociological understanding of families' encounters with the preschool market, it is likely that mothers play a crucial role in this process.

Within the grouping of educational fields, there are two categories that are excluded from the analysis of structuring factors by being set as passive (as well as the category of missing information);<sup>322</sup> however, all other information on the individuals is included. These categories are agriculture, animals, and general education. Regarding the fore, only 1.0 percent of the families had their highest education within this field, meaning that this category was too small to use in the analysis. Whilst general education does have a reasonable number of individuals for its inclusion, holding general education, rather than a more defined educational track, is too strongly associated with educational level. Typically, those without a university education hold this preparatory educational track, meaning that it is highly correlated with lower educational levels. Furthermore, general education as an educational track fails to provide additional information about the families and thus is removed from the analysis.

Having an immigration history is a social characteristic posed to be tightly associated with the search for international education, at least amongst privileged migrant groups and especially those undergoing temporary stays in new nation-states.<sup>323</sup> Rather than simply characterising families as having immigrated or not, the inclusion of time frames (never immigrated, immigrated before 2005, immigrated between 2005–2013, and since 2013) distinguishes families according to the time they have been in the country. This approach is a plausible measure of time-based investments in and outside the country, which may influence how families navigate the preschool landscape. The variable *Immigration* (Immigration) captures whether at least one parent in a family unit has immi-

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<sup>319</sup> Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme, 'Struggling with Capital'.

<sup>320</sup> If education track is missing for the parent with the highest education, information is taken from the other parent.

<sup>321</sup> E.g. Ball et al., 'Middle Class Fractions, Childcare and the "Relational" and "Normative" Aspects of Class Practices'; Emma Laurin, 'Barn Med Diagnoser: Mödrars Och Skolors Strategier i Stockholm' (Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2021); Mackenzie, Hayden, and Thompson, 'Parental Priorities in the Selection of International Schools'.

<sup>322</sup> Hjellbrekke, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis for the Social Sciences*, 57; and see Le Roux and Rouanet, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis*.

<sup>323</sup> E.g. Adams and Agbenyega, 'Futurescaping'; Ball and Nikita, 'The Global Middle Class and School Choice'.

grated,<sup>324</sup> along with documenting the most recent instance of immigration if applicable. Even if only one parent has immigrated, the family is assigned the characteristic of having immigrated, which captures the family unit's possession of this transnational attribute.

The final variable, *Mother's Age* (Mothers Age), relates to just mothers. Incorporating maternal age into studies on parenting practices is advocated owing to the diverse array of objective and subjective experiences associated with mothers' age. The social support mothers receive from extended family, which plausibly extends to aid in navigating childcare options, is intricately linked to maternal age. Furthermore, mothers' perceptions of their children are related to age, with discernible differences in parenting practices observed across various age groups.<sup>325</sup> The variable is calculated for the year the child enrolled at preschool. In commonality with the other variables, this is divided into groups: younger (under 32), middle (32–39), and older (40 and older).<sup>326</sup> The primary objective of constructing the space is to delve into preschool choices. Consequently, the focus is on the children's most recent enrolment in a preschool. As a result, the mother's age is linked to their most recent choice in the educational landscape, which may not necessarily be their initial selection.

Having outlined the construction of family units and the social characteristics ascribed to these families, the chapter now proceeds to analyse how these characteristics are distributed amongst families.

## Unveiling Oppositions, Hierarchies, and Distinctions

Revealing the social structures of the population of families involves uncovering the similarities and differences in the constellations of these social characteristics they possess. The method generates a visual map wherein each family occupies a relational position determined by their specific combination of characteristics – families with similar compositions are situated close to each other in this space, indicating their social proximity.

The first step in the analysis involves examining the dimensions of the space to determine the number of axes that are meaningful for interpretation. Each axis captures a specific structure or polarity within the combinations of social characteristics observed in families. However, not all dimensions are equally valuable for sociological analysis, and their contributions to the overall variance of the multidimensional space vary. The space comprises multiple axes, each capturing

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<sup>324</sup> Immigrations are typically registered if an individual enters the country of returns after having been out of the country for twelve months.

<sup>325</sup> Marc H. Bornstein et al., 'Maternal Chronological Age, Prenatal and Perinatal History, Social Support, and Parenting of Infants', *Child Development* 77, no. 4 (2006): 875–92.

<sup>326</sup> These age ranges were selected to ensure that the groups were on relevant sizes for the analysis.

a specific polarity observed in the data.<sup>327</sup> As the number of axes increases, their individual significance in explaining the variation in the space decreases, indicating their diminishing relevance for the analysis. The following sections summarise the distinctions revealed by each axis in terms of the constellations of social characteristics possessed by the families. These distinctions manifest as oppositions between families that are situated on different ends of the space.

The space of families comprises a total of eleven axes with above-average contributions (axes with eigenvalues  $>1/Q$ ). The modified rates of the eleven axes (Table 2) provide insights into their respective contributions to the overall variance of the space, representing different structures within the dataset.<sup>328</sup> The first axis, which captures the most variance in the space, explains 54.7 percent; this axis contains the most dominating structures between families. The second axis contributes 19.9 percent of the variance, while the third accounts for 7.6 percent. These three axes account for a substantial portion of the variance, 82.2 percent. The fourth axis was examined, as it showed a contribution level that is not significantly distant from that of the third axis. However, its sociological interpretation did not prove particularly useful for the study. Consequently, the interpretation focuses on the first three axes, which are the most influential in capturing the structural patterns within the space of families.<sup>329</sup> Thus, the foundation of the analysis is the interrelation of the social structures captured in these three axes.

Table 2. Eigenvalues and variance.

Axis	Eigenvalue	Modified Rate	Cumulated Rate
1	0.310	54.7	54.7
2	0.241	19.9	74.6
3	0.202	7.6	82.2
4	0.191	5.2	87.4
5	0.183	3.8	91.2
6	0.178	3.0	94.2
7	0.169	1.8	96.0
8	0.166	1.5	97.5
9	0.165	1.4	98.9
10	0.157	0.7	99.6
11	1.152	0.4	100

After narrowing down the axes for analysis, the focus shifts to the categories contributing to each axis's variance. This entails identifying the constellations of family characteristics that form the polarities within each axis, referred to as oppositions. The analysis examines each axis individually, starting with the first axis, which has the highest contribution to the overall variance and thus captures the opposition that dominates the social structure. Subsequently, the interrelation between the axes is explored. Table 3 presents the contributions of all categories on the three axes. Categories that surpass the average contribution (threshold of

<sup>327</sup> See Brigitte. Le Roux and Henry Rouanet, *Geometric Data Analysis: From Correspondence Analysis to Structured Data Analysis* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2004); Hjellbrekke, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis for the Social Sciences*.

<sup>328</sup> Hjellbrekke, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis for the Social Sciences*, 35–37.

<sup>329</sup> Le Roux and Rouanet, *Geometric Data Analysis*, 51.

4.5) are considered relevant for the analysis. The three axes are examined in pairs, effectively transforming the multidimensional space into planes, the interrelation between axes one and two, one and three, or two and three. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between different axes. Whilst the social characteristics take centre stage in the analysis, these are possessed by families, with each individual family taking up a relational position with one another. This is visually represented as the space of individuals in Appendix A, which presents the position of each family unit within the space.

Table 3. Contributions of active categories, axes 1–3. Above-average contributions appear in bold.

Category	Axis 1	Axis 2	Axis 3
Income: Low	10.4	0.3	0.5
Income: Mid-Low	<b>8.8</b>	0.1	0.6
Income: Mid	0.3	2.9	0.6
Income: Mid-High	6.7	0.5	4.0
Income: High	5.3	<b>5.8</b>	0.2
Total	31.5	9.6	5.9
Ed Level: Compulsory & Upper Secondary	14.5	0.0	0.0
Ed Level: PostSec no HE	2.9	3.6	0.1
Ed Level: HE <= 4 years	11.2	0.2	<b>6.2</b>
Ed Level: HE > 4 years	0.8	<b>8.8</b>	<b>31.8</b>
Total	39.4	12.6	38.1
Ed Track: Admin & Economy	0.6	15.4	1.2
Ed Track: Health, Service & Social Care	0.9	17.2	2.4
Ed Track: Humanities & Social Science	2.4	1.9	<b>18.9</b>
Ed Track: Natural Science & Engineering	0.2	3.7	<b>18.6</b>
Total	4.1	38.2	41.1
Immigration: Never	6.5	0.2	1.5
Immigration: Before 2005	0.5	0.2	0.5
Immigration: 2005–2013	1.6	0.3	7.6
Immigration: Recent	5.5	1.4	0.0
Total	14.1	2.1	9.6
Employment Sector: Private	0.0	10.5	0.9
Employment Sector: Public	1.1	26.4	1.3
Total	1.1	36.9	2.2
Mothers Age: Younger	14.7	0.1	2.1
Mothers Age: Mid	2.7	0.0	0.8
Mothers Age: Older	2.5	0.4	0.0
Total	19.9	0.5	2.9

## Opposition 1: Resource-rich Swedes and Resource-weak Recent Migrants

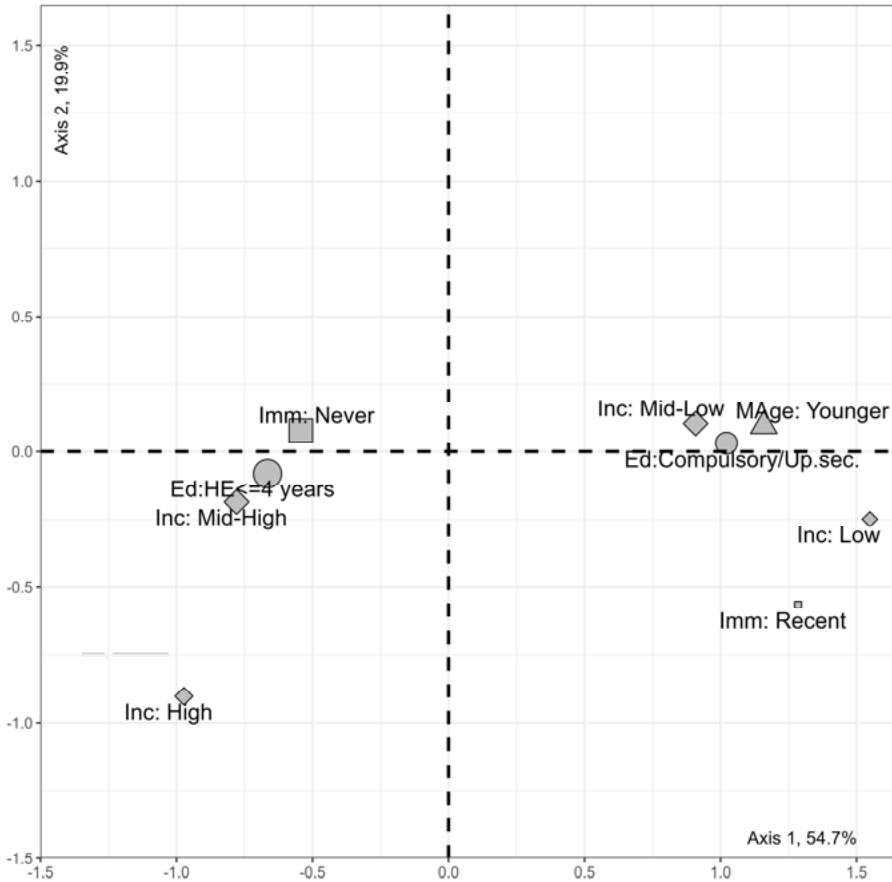
The main opposition observed amongst the families is between resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants, interpreted by the categories contributing to the variance of this axis (see Figure 2).<sup>330</sup> The term migrant rather than immigrant is necessary as whilst 68.2 percent of the recently migrating families comprise two foreign-born parents, 23.2 percent and 8.5 percent are families with one Swedish and one foreign-born parent or two Swedish-born parents, respectively. Thus, whilst foreign background families are overrepresented in this category, they cannot be said to be of only immigrant backgrounds. However, to

<sup>330</sup> See Appendix A, Table 6 for their coordinates.



the left of the space, where families have never immigrated, they can be classed as Swedish, as they were born in Sweden and have never left to return.

Figure 2. Categories contributing above average to Axis 1, plane 1–2.



To the left of the space, Swedish families tend to be well-educated, having at least four years of higher education. However, whilst they are secure in their educational resources, they do not belong to the group of most highly educated families with more than four years of higher education. Regarding their income levels, families on this side of the space are affluent, receiving either high or mid-high incomes. Thus, these families can be categorised as established Swedish middle classes.

Specific to these families, in contrast to those on the right of the space, is that they tend to have no immigration history, meaning they are firmly anchored in the national context. Therefore, this opposition indicates ethno-racial/national struggles of domination, which are symbolically anchored in national belonging-

ness and identity and linked to the possession of other forms of capital.<sup>331</sup> It is proposed that one path to the acquisition of international capital is through extended stays abroad.<sup>332</sup> These Swedish families have not pursued this path; their secure rootedness indicates more nationally bound investments (or other routes for investing in international assets).

To the right of the map, one finds families with combinations of social characteristics dissimilar to the resource-rich Swedes. Here, families tend to have recently immigrated to Sweden, possess low educational levels, and belong to the lowest income bracket. Influential in this structure is also the age of mothers at the time of their children's enrolment in preschool. They tend to be young, a characteristic generally associated with lower educational and economic resources.

In summary, the opposition observed in the first axis reflects a fundamental and rigid hierarchy that shapes society – the possession of economic and educational resources.<sup>333</sup> Both exert significant influence over various aspects of individuals' daily lives. Additionally, these families' immigration histories shed light on the correlation between the time spent in a national context and the possession of the influential forms of capital, educational and economic. However, it is worth noting that the opposition did not fully capture the extremes in the unequal distribution of educational assets. The most highly educated individuals were not prominently represented within this particular opposition.

## Opposition 2: Highly Educated Public Sector Families and Affluent Private Sector Families

The second strongest opposition within the space is between highly educated families linked to the public sector and those economically affluent families connected to the private sector (see Figure 3). In contrast to the first axis, which highlighted distinctions between resource-rich and resource-weak families, the second opposition captures structures amongst those with high levels of resources. This axis represents a horizontal rather than a vertical power structure. Here, a polarity between families with the highest educational levels and income becomes apparent, highlighting the dynamics of resource distribution.

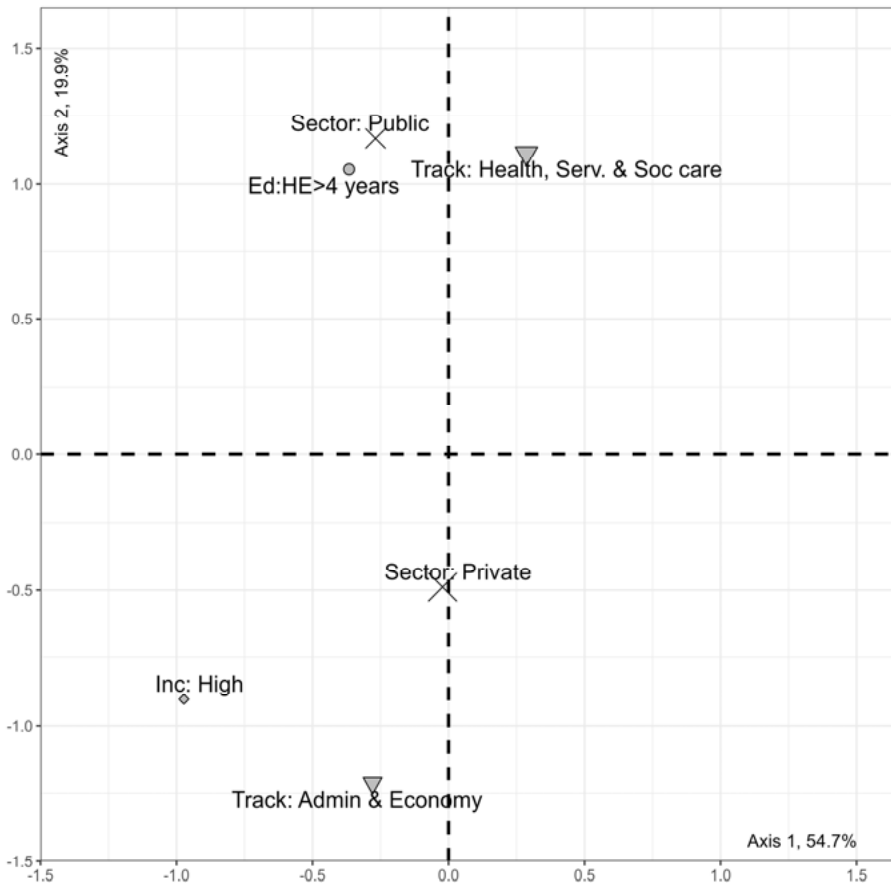
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<sup>331</sup> Atkinson, *Bourdieu and After*, 122–27 A full analysis of these struggles is not, however, possible due to available data.

<sup>332</sup> E.g. Bühlmann, David, and Mach, 'Cosmopolitan Capital and the Internationalization of the Field of Business Elites: Evidence from the Swiss Case'; Igarashi and Saito, 'Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital'; Jansson, 'How to Become an "Elite Cosmopolitan"'; Wagner, 'Les classes dominantes à l'épreuve de la mondialisation'.

<sup>333</sup> It is their lower levels of these dominant species of capital that categorise these families as weak. The terms does not attempt to imply that they lack other resources.

Figure 3. Categories contributing above average to Axis 2, plane 1–2.



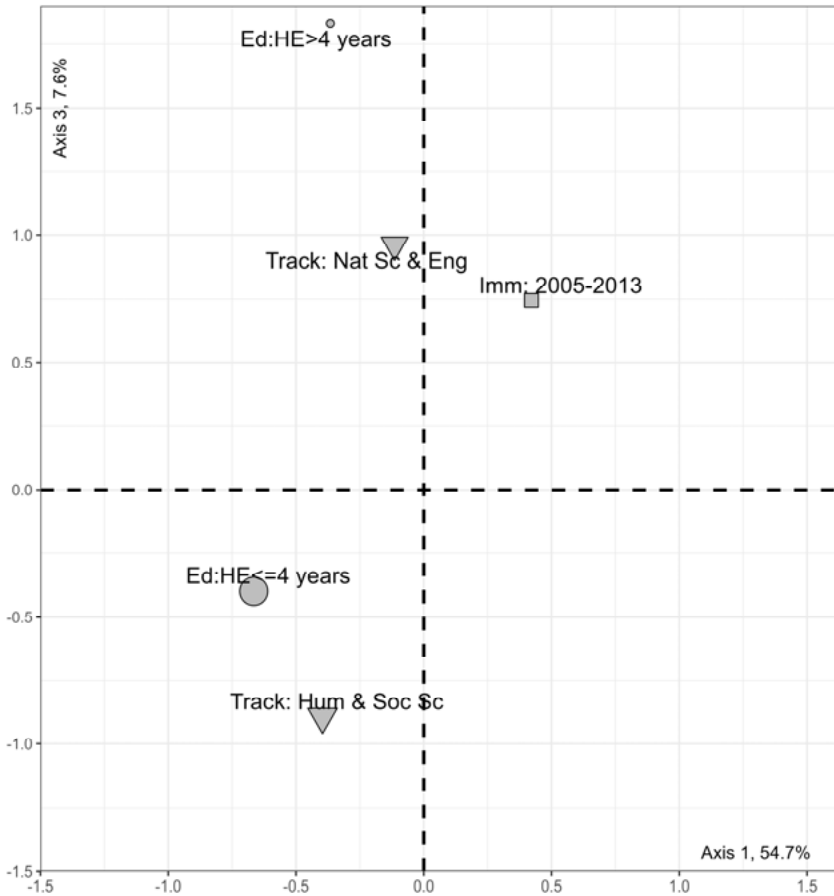
To the top of the space is an over-representation of families that have attained the highest educational levels (over four years), whilst to the bottom are those in the highest income bracket. Certain educational tracks are also influential here. Those who have invested more heavily in education tend also to be those having studied health, service, or social care, fields generally tied to the public sector. On the other hand, those with the highest incomes are educated in administration and economy, tracks associated with the private sector.

The contrast between these groups does not suggest that the highly educated public sector families have low economic resources, nor that those orientated towards the private sector have low educational levels. On the contrary, possessing high educational capital tends to be synonymous with high incomes, and high-income earners in the private sector are often university-educated. However, when it comes to specific compositions of social characteristics, the contrast between those with both high incomes and links to the private sector classifies them as distinct from those with particularly high education levels working in the public sector.

### Opposition 3: Established Migrant Families in the Natural Sciences and Families in the Humanities and Social Sciences

The third and final opposition reveals a polarity amongst highly educated families and highlights distinctions concerning their specific education level and the subjects of their highest educational qualification (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Categories contributing above average to Axis 3, plane 1–3.



Families situated at the top of the space tend to belong to the group with the highest education, having over four years of university education. Amongst these families, there is an overrepresentation of those educated in the natural sciences. Those to the bottom of the space, whilst still highly educated, possess under five years of university education, meaning they are not in the highest education category. The educational tracks overrepresented amongst these families are in the humanities and social sciences. Immigration history is also influential in this opposition, providing a further dimension of distinction. To the top of the space, one finds that these natural scientists are also characterised by having immigrated

to Sweden between 2005 and 2013. In commonality with those having recent immigration histories discussed in the analysis of the first axis, having an immigration history cannot be directly interpreted as being an immigrant in the sense of being born in a country outside of Sweden.

Of those families immigrating to Sweden between 2005 and 2013, 50.5 percent comprise two parents born outside of Sweden. The remaining families have either one Swedish and one foreign-born parent (34.1%) or two Swedish-born parents (15.4%). Thus, whilst over 80 percent of families with this characteristic can be classed as having foreign backgrounds, the group cannot be identified as being entirely made up of immigrant families. However, the importance of this category in the dynamic of the axis sheds light on how immigration interacts with educational resources. These migrants who have invested time in Sweden are associated with high levels of education. This pattern differs from that concerning recent migrant families, which were discussed in relation to the first axis. Recent migration was associated with the possession of lower levels of educational and economic capital.<sup>334</sup>

## Professions in the Space

To further interpret the structures found in the axes, the professions<sup>335</sup> of families can be projected into the space, inspecting the intersection of two axes simultaneously. As supplementary information,<sup>336</sup> these occupations provide further information for analysis of the structures captured in the space. The profession chosen to represent the family is that of the most highly educated parent, a logic followed in the construction of the space concerning the families' educational tracks.

Turning first to the intersection of axes one and two, the oppositions of resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants and highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families, Figure 5 shows the distribution of occupations. To the left of the space, where families are well educated and have high and mid-high incomes, one finds occupations that demand high education and offer high wages, such as IT professionals and higher officials. These occupations are distributed along the second axis, distinguishing their association

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<sup>334</sup> The immigration category pertaining to those who had immigrated pre-2005 was not influential in the main oppositions captured in the first three axes. However, the midpoint of this category was relatively close to those who had never immigrated, which further evidences the association of investments through time leading to the possession of higher levels of economic and educational capital.

<sup>335</sup> The classification scheme of occupations employed was first developed by Donald Broady and Mikael Palme, 'Högskolan som fält och studenternas livsbanor' (Självbiografi, kultur och livsform, Helsinki, 1989) and based on occupations, education, and employment sector. The scheme builds on registry data from Statistics Sweden with some modifications influenced by the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008. The latest version of this scheme has been developed by Emil Bertilsson, Department of Education, Uppsala University.

<sup>336</sup> Due to occupations reflecting education and income, their correlations were too strong to include in the creation of the space.

with the private and public sectors. To the bottom left of the space, one finds chief executive officers (CEOs), economists and accountants, whilst university teachers, physicians, vets, and dentists are at the top left. The right of the space, where resource-weak recent migrants are located, one finds occupations that do not demand higher education, such as care attendants and non-trained workers in different sectors. There is a less vertical distribution to this side of the space, evidencing that the differentiation between private and public sectors is predominantly associated with those with high educational and economic capital.<sup>337</sup>

Figure 5. Professions of families, based on highest educated parent, plane 1–2.



<sup>337</sup> This is illustrated by the cloud of individuals in Appendix A. To the left, where families are relatively educationally and economically strong, one sees a wider distribution along the second axis compared to those to the right of the space where families possess lower levels of these resources.

The intersection of the first and third axes (Figure 6), which captures the oppositions of the resource-rich Swedes and the resource-weak recent migrants, along with established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences, the distribution of the professions illustrates clearly that the third axis captures distinctions amongst the middle classes. Professions to the right of the space have little vertical distribution, whilst those to the left, where educational and economic capital is strong, span the third axis. Moreover, examining these two axes together illuminates the dynamics of migration.

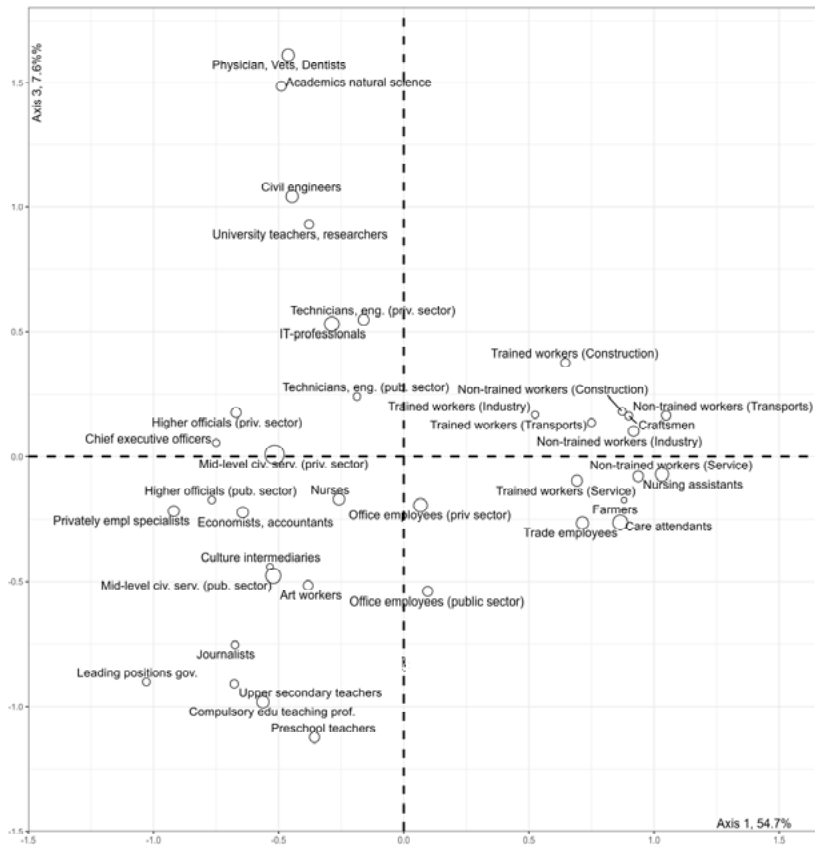
Occupations at the top of the space include physicians, vets, and dentists, along with academics in the natural science, civil engineers, university teachers and researchers, all professions which not only demand long investments in education but are also fields of employment that foreign-born individuals with educational capital are highly present in.<sup>338</sup> Moreover, some of these professions do not demand national certification, meaning those with foreign educational credentials can directly enter these positions in the Swedish labour market. The same cannot be said for those professions to the bottom left of the space that are particularly nation-orientated occupations, such as teachers and leading positions in government. Hence, whilst the top of the space is not solely categorised by foreign-born families, the professions located in this area, linked to high educational investments and particular educational tracks, are distinguished by their association with migrant families, albeit predominantly those who have invested time in the country as well.<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> For example, the number of foreign-born doctors in Sweden has risen over the past two decades, with 30 percent of doctors in the country born outside of the country in the year 2015. OECD, 'International Migration and Movement of Doctors to and within OECD Countries - 2000 to 2018: Developments in Countries of Destination and Impact on Countries of Origin', OECD Health Working Papers, 2021.

<sup>339</sup> The immigration category for those who immigrated pre-2005 was not influential in the main oppositions captured in the first three axes. However, the midpoint of this category was relatively close to those who had never immigrated, further evidencing the association of investments over time and the possession of higher levels of economic and educational capital.

Figure 6. Professions of families, based on highest educated parent, plane 1–3.



Finally, the second and third axes, where the opposition of highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families intersect with established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences, show that some occupations associated with the humanities and social sciences are drawn to the right-hand side of the space of the public sector. Teachers, mid-level civil servants in the public sector and cultural intermediaries, for example, are all found in this area. Their position at the bottom of the space rather than the top indicates both their educational level and their professions being less associated with migrant families. To the top of the space, where the most highly educated are, the intersection of the second axis divides these families by their affiliation with the public and private sectors. University teachers, physicians, vets and dentists are to the right of the space, whilst civil engineers are more to the left towards the private sector. Thus, whilst the third axis captured the structure between natural scientists and humanities, inspecting these two axes together shows that within the group of natural scientists, distinctions exist in their professions and sectors of employment.



Figure 7. Professions of families, based on highest educated parent, plane 2–3.



### Summary of the Space

The analysis of the distribution of social characteristics within this population of families showed the social structures that underlie them. Three main oppositions were found to structure the data. The first and most prominent opposition that emerged pertained to the fundamental mechanisms of power in society, the possession of educational and economic resources. The distribution of these resources related to families’ immigration backgrounds; recent migrants (most of which comprised families with foreign backgrounds) were associated with lower levels of these resources, whilst the university-educated and higher-earners were Swedish and had never immigrated.

The second opposition emerged between the most highly educated families working in the public sector and top-earning families in the private sector. This revealed a nuanced distinction among families with generally higher levels of assets, dividing them into two groups: those who primarily possess economic capital and those who have made significant investments in educational capital.

In this context, the differences between the highest earners and the most highly educated individuals became evident, a structure previously obscured by the dichotomy of the first opposition. The distribution of professions further evidenced that the second opposition concerned those with generally higher educational and economic capital levels.

Finally, the third opposition emerged between established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. This opposition was not solely related to families' educational track but also education level; natural scientists belonged to the most highly educated group, whilst the humanities and social scientists had under five years of higher education. Moreover, immigration was also influential in this structure; migrants arriving in Sweden between 2005 and 2013 were overrepresented amongst these highly educated natural scientists. Having revealed the social structures and oppositions among families, the focus now shifts towards exploring how these relate to the preschool landscape and families' choice of an international preschool.

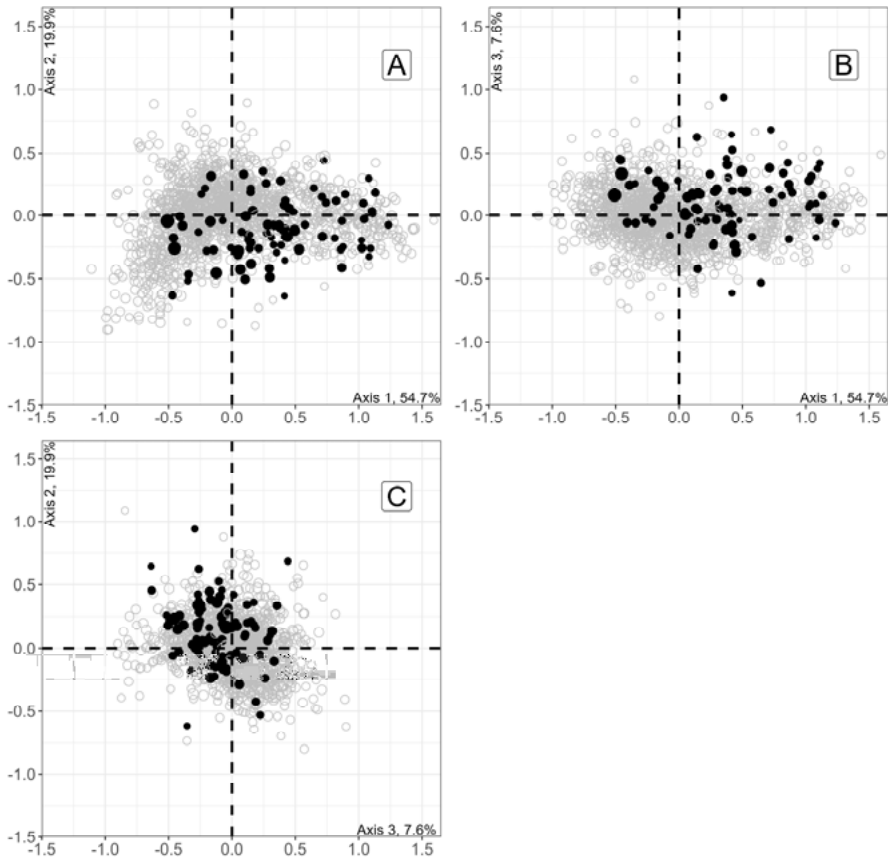
## Preschool Enrolment Patterns

In this section, attention is turned to preschools, honing in on the relationship between families and preschools. Each individual preschool is projected into the space, delineated according to the enrolled families' midpoint, thus capturing the particularities of their social recruitment in relation to the social structures of families. The analysis involves inspecting the distribution of preschools within the multidimensional space of families, examining two dimensions at a time. To begin, the distribution of international preschools is compared to that of all preschools in the geographical area in focus. Subsequently, the analysis focuses solely on international preschools, inspecting specific institutions regarding their pedagogical offer, namely their language profile.

## Comparing International and Non-International Preschools

Perhaps the most fundamental question regarding recruitment to international preschools is whether it differs from those that do not have an international orientation, and if so, in what ways. Figure 8 provides a visual representation of all preschools, encompassing both international and non-international establishments. The figure consists of three panels: A, displaying the interplay between opposition one (horizontally) and opposition two (vertically); B, depicting the opposition one (horizontally) and opposition three (vertically); and C, opposition two (horizontally) and opposition three (vertically). Preschools without an international orientation are represented as white circles (with grey outlines), whereas those classified as international are black circles.

Figure 8. International and non-international preschools, planes 1–2, 1–3, 2–3.



It becomes immediately apparent that whilst the oppositions captured in the analysis of the space illustrate significant distinctions among families, certain structures carry less weight in terms of differences in preschool enrolment patterns. In panel A, which shows the horizontal polarity between resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants and the vertical distinction between highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families, one observes some distinct patterns in preschool enrolment. Preschools without international orientations are predominantly located in the centre of the space, indicating that the families attending them tend to have less distinct compositions of social characteristics due to an even distribution of distinct families or, more likely, their weaker associations with the specific characteristics forming the polarities.<sup>340</sup> However, not all preschools are in this area; they span along the first

<sup>340</sup> Distances of 0.5 from central point are said to have significance. Le Roux and Rouanet, *Geometric Data Analysis*, 197–98; Le Roux and Rouanet, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis*, 59.

axis towards the side of the space where families are characterised as having recently immigrated, being young, and having low educational and economic capital. Generally, the closer these preschools are positioned to this side of the axis, the less distribution they demonstrate along the second axis.

To the left of the space, there is a greater dispersion along the second axis, suggesting that these preschools have particular recruitment within fractions of the middle classes. There is an observable clustering of preschools towards the bottom-left region of the space, which indicates that these preschools are relatively homogeneous, recruiting Swedish background families who are well-educated, economically affluent, and work in the private sector. In contrast, there are fewer preschools located in the top-left area of the space, where families are Swedish, possess the highest educational levels, and are linked to the public sector. This pattern suggests the effect of neighbourhood segregation, where individuals with higher incomes tend to reside in affluent areas alongside other economically well-off families, an effect less apparent amongst the most highly educated.<sup>341</sup>

Concerning the same axes, many international preschools, in commonality with non-international preschools, are situated in the central region of the space, where the distinctions in families' social characteristics are less pronounced. However, in relation to their number, international preschools are more often found on the right-hand side of the space, towards the area of resource-weak recent migrants. Fewer are located to the left of the space, where a distinct Swedish middle class is found. Those preschools to the left on the first axis move downwards on the second axis somewhat towards economically affluent families working in the private sector. This corroborates, to a degree, that international education, even at the preschool level, is more often associated with the economic fractions of the middle classes.<sup>342</sup>

Turning now to inspect preschools on the first and third oppositions (Panel B), one sees how two immigration categories play out concerning preschool enrolment. As within panel A, the majority of the non-international preschools are centred in the middle of the space. However, there is a lower degree of dispersion along the vertical axis now the opposition of the highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families is replaced by the established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. International preschools, on the other hand, span further vertically towards the top of the space. With the midpoint for the category of those who immigrated between the years 2005 and 2013 positioned in the top-right quadrant and the category for recent immigration to the right of the space but centralised along the

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<sup>341</sup> Jonathan J. B. Mijs and Elizabeth L. Roe, 'Is America Coming Apart? Socioeconomic Segregation in Neighborhoods, Schools, Workplaces, and Social Networks, 1970–2020', *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 6 (2021).

<sup>342</sup> Becker-Cavallin and Knoll, 'Establishing Multiple Languages in Early Childhood. Heritage Languages and Language Hierarchies in German-English Daycare Centers in Switzerland.'; Koh and Ziqi, "'Start-up' Capital"; Prošić-Santovac and Radović, 'Children's vs. Teachers' and Parents' Agency'.

third axis, the concentration of international preschools between these two points suggests a connection between immigration background and the decision to enrol children in international preschools. Thus, the data indicates an association between the choice of international preschool and having an immigration background, whether this be recent migrants with limited resources or less recent migrants with higher resources.

Panel C shows preschools on axes two and three. Together, these axes show the intersection of highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families with established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. Most preschools, with and without international orientations, are centred in the middle of the space, suggesting the oppositions captured in these axes do not translate to particular recruitment patterns between preschools. However, there are some institutions, both international and non-international, that have more distinct positions. A handful of international preschools are located further towards the top of the space, one slightly to the right and the others to the left. The positions of these preschools suggest that they attract families with somewhat distinct characteristics. The intersection of these axes delineates a separation among highly educated natural scientists based on their affiliations with the private or public sectors. Preschools on the left side tend to be more associated with families oriented towards the private sector, including professions such as civil engineers and technicians, whilst the preschool to the right caters for those with links to the public sector in occupations like university teaching and research.

Through this comparison of the distribution of international and non-international preschools in relation to the distinctions among families, it becomes evident that some tendencies indicate differences between the two. For example, the distribution of international preschools does not span to institutions catering for only homogenous middle-class Swedish families. However, these groups are also a part of the recruitment to international preschools. Neither international nor non-international preschools exhibit defined social recruitment patterns; individual institutions attract different families, which can be driven by aspects such as their geographical location or socio-geographic parenting cultures.<sup>343</sup> International preschools generally do not hold a specific social position in this preschool landscape; they span the breadth of the social hierarchies and distinctions amongst families, suggesting that they may have different meanings for families in various social positions.

It can be inferred that international preschools cater to families with immigration histories, but they also serve Swedish families that have never immigrated. Additionally, non-international preschools are attended by families with immigration backgrounds. Thus, attending international preschools is not simply a question of possessing specific social characteristics, at least not based on those used within this analysis. In the following section, the category of

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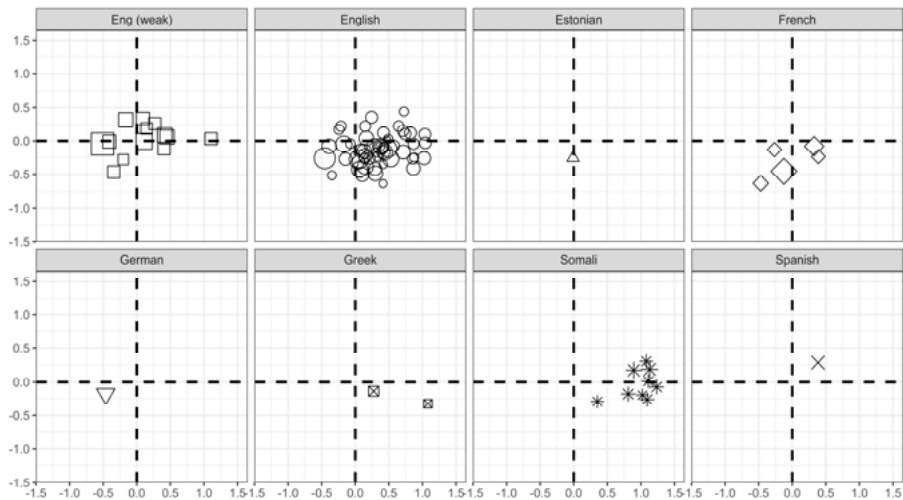
<sup>343</sup> Holloway, 'Local Childcare Cultures'.

international preschools is broken down based on the particularities of their language provision to inspect the relationship between the variations in these characteristics and their social recruitment. Although specific details about their profiles and the names of individual institutions are not disclosed, the analysis incorporates information about these institutions, taking into account aspects such as their unique form of internationalism and their geographic locations.

### Hierarchies and Distinctions in Language Provision

All the international preschools in the population offer foreign language provision. Languages offered alongside Swedish are English, Estonian, French, German, Greek, Somali, and Spanish. Those offering English are divided into two groups: those with stronger language profiles, typically bilingual or with English as a significant part of their marketing promotion, and the other group with what are termed weak English profiles. Preschools in the latter group tend to describe their pedagogical approach as providing an introduction to English, presenting it as a language to be acquired as a foreign language. In contrast, the stronger-profiled preschools position English as more integral to their identity, even presenting themselves as environments suitable for English speakers.

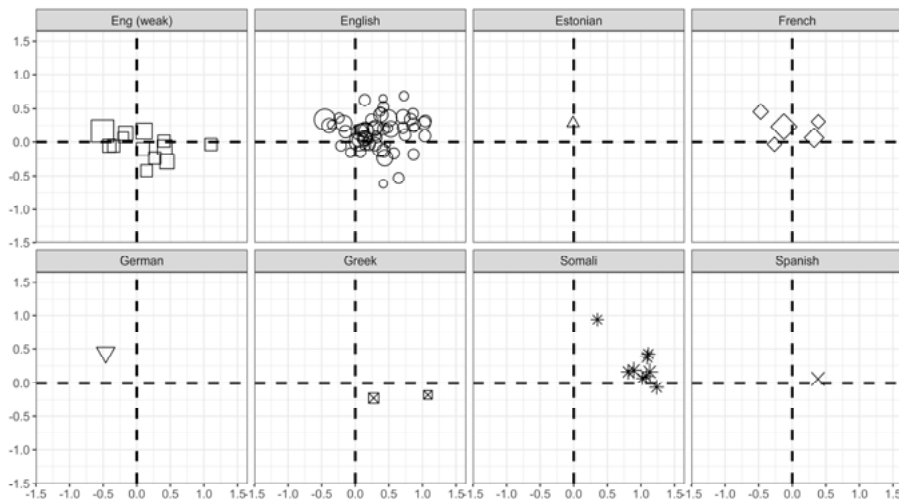
Figure 9. Preschools by language profiles, plane 1–2.



In Figure 9, preschools are located on axes one and two, and in Figure 10, they are on axes one and three. There are 61 preschools with a strong English profile, meaning they make up the majority of international preschools. They do not hold a shared particular position in the space but are found distributed in the space in comparison to all others. In Figure 9, aside from those in the centre of the space, a handful are positioned to the left, with a more significant number distributed to the right. Inspecting where these preschools are located within

Stockholm sheds light on their distinct positions to one another. Of those positioned more to the bottom left of Figure 9, two belong to the Futura chain and are located in affluent areas, one in the central city and the other in a neighbouring municipality. A third is a large preschool, one of the most oversubscribed preschools in the city. It is, like the others, located in an affluent neighbourhood. In the past year, this preschool has somewhat diminished its international profile somewhat, possibly indicating its popularity amongst local middle-class Swedish families. Those to the right of the space are found in less affluent suburbs of the city, such as Kista. Thus, whilst the pedagogical orientation of these preschools is similar in the sense that they all offer bilingual English environments, the people they cater to differ. This suggests that the interest in this form of internationality spans class hierarchies, at least when class is studied in intersection with transnational characteristics such as immigration histories.

Figure 10. Preschools by language profiles, plane 1–3.



In Figure 10, the English preschools hold some of the most distinct positions. The institution located highest up the third axis is a preschool close to a university in the city, which plausibly attracts its employees. This may explain its proximity to those families with the highest education. In this same panel, many of the English preschools that are found to the right of the space are drawn slightly up the third axis. Taking into consideration the location of the social categories that formed this top opposition, in which the category of highest education was to the top-left of the third axis, it can be deduced that what may be influencing these preschools' position on the third axis, is the category of immigration that is found on nearer the midpoint of the space. Finally, there are two preschools on the lower side of the space, which suggests that these two institutions are less characterised by migrant families. They are found near the professions of mid-level civil servants in the public sector and nationally focused occupations such as teachers.

These results can be further examined by exploring the levels of over and underrepresentation of families with different immigrant histories in English-language international preschools. Based on the same population of families used in the construction of the space, Figure 11<sup>344</sup> presents how these immigration groups are represented in English preschools. Furthermore, within the same visual representation, one can draw comparisons with the backgrounds of children. This comparison sheds light on how immigration histories are intricately linked to the composition of families, elucidating specific relationships identified in the space and providing additional explanations. On a general level, families who have never immigrated and have children born in Sweden are underrepresented in these preschools. The most highly overrepresented migrant families are those who migrated recently and between the years 2005 and 2013.

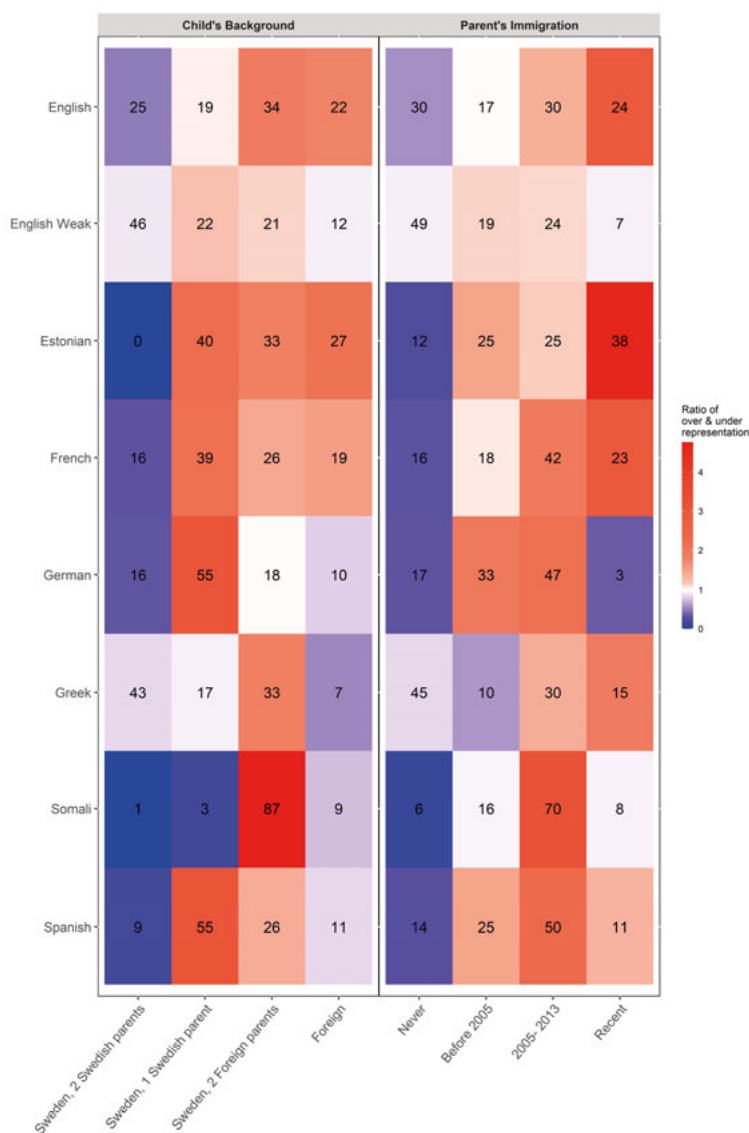
Again, this suggests that the length of time families have resided in the country is associated with the choice to educate children internationally. The overrepresentation of foreign-born children in these preschools is presumably linked to recent immigration, given the young age of the children. However, even those born in Sweden to two foreign parents are overrepresented in these preschools. This trend might suggest a pursuit of international education among parents rather than addressing the specific needs of foreign-born children. In the case of Swedish-born children with one Swedish and one foreign-born parent, the degree of overrepresentation is minimal. This pattern implies that the pursuit of international education diminishes when only one parent is not from the country, highlighting that education choices for children are influenced by the compositions of characteristics within the family units.

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<sup>344</sup> The heatmap shows the over and under-representation in enrolment patterns regarding children's backgrounds and parents' migration histories. General shares of the distribution of each category of child's background and parents' migration are represented numerically within the tiles. Ratios are calculated regarding the degree to which the share of each category (of the two variables) compares to the wider population. The lowest underrepresentation is limited to 0.0, and overrepresentation has no limitations. Values above one indicate overrepresentation, and those under one indicate underrepresentation.



Figure 11. Ratio of over and under-representation in enrolment patterns by children’s backgrounds and parents’ most recent immigration in language profiles.



Turning now to those preschools that offer English in an introductory fashion, one sees apparent differences between these institutions and their bilingual English counterparts. Whilst bilingual English preschools were spread to the right of the space, none of these weaker English-profiled preschools are located in this area, suggesting they are not associated with families of recent migration with lower educational and economic capital. This observation is supported by the ratios of over and underrepresentation (see Figure 11), where recent migrants are

underrepresented in these preschools. The majority of these preschools are found in the centre of the space, suggesting their recruitment is not tied to a particular dimension captured in the space. Those more to the left of the space indicate that they also cater for more rooted Swedish families. However, families who have never immigrated and those with children born in Sweden to two Swedish parents are underrepresented in these preschools (see Figure 11), albeit to a lesser degree than in bilingual English preschools.<sup>345</sup> When compared to bilingual English preschools, these international preschools exhibit a higher overrepresentation of families that immigrated before 2005 and those with children born in Sweden to one Swedish and one foreign-born parent. This implies that there may be interest in international education within these families, but they avoid heavy international investments and opt for more Swedish environments.

Moving now to the French preschools, which are much fewer in number than those with English profiles. These five preschools are found relatively close to the centre of the space when looking at the intersection of the first and second axes (Figure 9). However, there are differences between individual institutions. In particular, two are drawn further down the space, suggesting they are more associated with the affluent private sector than the public sector. One of these preschools is attached to a fee-charging international school, indicating that many of these families have the economic means to pay for school fees and are willing to do so in a country like Sweden, where private fee-paying schools are not a typical part of the educational landscape.

However, when these preschools are examined based on the intersection of the first and third axes (see Figure 10), they are located slightly above the middle area on the third axis. This suggests that while these families are resource-rich, they are also characterised by being highly educated, particularly in the natural sciences, and also have immigration histories. However, the ratios of over and underrepresentation inform that whilst these preschools are positioned relatively far from the category of recent immigration in the space of families, they do have a strong level of overrepresentation, suggesting that the recent migrants they cater for cannot also be characterised as resource-weak. Their significant overrepresentation of families with Swedish-born children with one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent suggests that this form of internationality within the family translates to a search within the family for continual investment. While this was less prominent in English preschools, it indicates that investing in French education becomes more crucial for the children of mixed nationality families.

Much like one of the French preschools, the German preschool is attached to a fee-charging international school and is centrally positioned when inspecting the intersection of axes 1 and 2 and axes 1 and 3. However, it is evident that this preschool does not cater to resource-weak families. Instead, it leans towards the

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<sup>345</sup> However, it should be noted that due to the much fewer number of individuals in these preschools compared to the wider population, these patterns are not completely rigorous.

left-hand side on both of these planes, indicating an association with resource-secure families. Little information is gained from its position on the second axis, suggesting that this preschool is neither strongly characterised by public nor private sector families. However, the intersection of the first and third axes indicates that these resource-secure families have immigration histories, albeit not recent (corroborated by the ratio of underrepresentation among this group as presented in Figure 11), and belong to the highest educational tiers, with an association with the natural sciences. In commonality with the French preschools, the overrepresentation of families with Swedish-born children with one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent suggests that investing in them becomes essential for families residing more permanently in Sweden with these transnational assets in the family.

The Greek preschools, both of which have recently played down their language profiles, have distinct positions from each other. These positions can be attributed to the demographics of their locations, with one in central Stockholm and the other in a northern, less affluent suburb. The preschool located in the northern suburb is positioned to the right of the space, close to the category of recently migrated families with limited economic and educational resources, as well as being young (see Figure 9). The other is positioned in the middle of the space, suggesting a more heterogeneous composition of families, or at least not as distinct in relation to the oppositions found in the social characteristics of families. Both of these preschools maintain similar positions when inspected on the intersection of the first and third axes (see Figure 10). Their divergent positions from each other suggest that if language offerings drive family choices for these preschools, the desire to provide a linguistic environment for their children is not solely a question of class.

Instead, it indicates that the idea of providing children with specific languages spans class hierarchies. Concerning the backgrounds of children, families whose children are born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents are overrepresented in the Greek preschools, while those born in Sweden to one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent are underrepresented, albeit weakly (see Figure 11). This pattern may suggest that investing in the Greek language becomes more important for family units where both parents are foreign-born, presumably Greek-speaking. This pattern was not observed in the French and German preschools, where these languages were more important to families with one Swedish-born and one foreign-born parent. This observation may suggest how global hierarchies of languages play out in the dynamics of families and translate to distinct educational choice patterns.

The Somali preschools hold a particularly distinct position in the space when viewed collectively. In contrast to English (both bilingual and introductory), French, German, and Greek preschools, which spanned across the space or were centred in the middle, almost all Somali preschools are positioned to the right, indicating families with weaker educational and economic resources (see figure 9). While their position might suggest an association with the category of recent

migrants, it is noteworthy that recent migrants are shown to be underrepresented in these preschools, as indicated in Figure 11. This suggests that their position is more related to resource scarcity than migration per se.

One preschool stands out more distinct than the others, positioned closer to the centre and drawn toward the left, where resources are stronger. This particular preschool also holds a unique position at the intersection of the first and third axes, taking a higher position where families are highly educated in the natural sciences and closer to the category of migration during 2005–2013 (see Figure 10). This suggests that while Somali preschools, all located in a northern suburb of Stockholm, tend to cater to families with lower levels of educational and economic capital, their choice to provide their children with Somali linguistic environments in preschool persists even when resources in Sweden are stronger. This holds true when compared to the fact that not all Somali-speaking families enrol their children in Somali-speaking preschools. This indicates that such preschool choices are far from being solely based on class and particular resources but rather suggests that educational practices are rooted in more complex decision-making processes.

The final two languages, Estonian and Spanish, are discussed together as neither exhibits distinct recruitment in comparison to the oppositions found in the social characteristics of families. Both are relatively central when inspecting axes one and two and axes one and three (see Figures 9 and 10). However, they do hold distinctions to one another. When examining the intersection of axes one and two, the Spanish preschool is slightly more associated with the public sector than the Estonian preschool. Exploring the over and underrepresentations of immigration groups and family backgrounds, both exhibit strong underrepresentations of families with Swedish background parents. Both also show overrepresentations of families with Swedish-born children having one Swedish and one foreign-born parent, as well as Swedish-born children with two foreign-born parents, indicating the influence of linguistic dynamics in family choices for preschools (see Figure 11).

There are differences in migration patterns of families between these preschools, which were not captured in the space, possibly due to specific time frames of migration histories. The Estonian preschool has an overrepresentation of families who most recently migrated before 2005 and an even stronger overrepresentation of recent migrants. The migration time frame in between is only minimally overrepresented. In contrast, the Spanish preschool has a relatively even spread of overrepresentation among the migrating groups, albeit with a stronger overrepresentation of those migrating between 2005 and 2003.

## Summary of Chapter

This chapter has explored the relationship between families and international preschools, aiming to uncover how social hierarchies and distinctions among families manifest in preschool enrolment patterns. Through the mapping of the social space of families, the similarities and differences in the combinations of

their social characteristics, including educational and economic capital, field of education, age, and migration histories, have been revealed, reflecting underlying structures prevalent in other segments of society.<sup>346</sup>

The multidimensional structures of social characteristics amongst families underscore the significance of examining the intersection of class, national belongingness, and ethnic groupings.<sup>347</sup> Although the analysis could not comprehensively explore all these dimensions, the results indicate the associations between class hierarchies and migration histories in determining families' social positions and how these factors can influence specific preschool choices for their children. However, a significant point highlighted by the analysis is that international preschools, as a collective, do not occupy a distinct position in the preschool landscape – at least not concerning the structures of social characteristics explored in this chapter. Instead, individual institutions seem to hold significance for specific social groups. This pattern illustrates that the value of internationality, especially in its diverse manifestations, extends across dimensions of social class and differences.

The dichotomy between local and mobile families, frequently studied in relation to international schooling,<sup>348</sup> was not evidently apparent in shaping the educational choices of international preschool families; these groups were found to often meet in international preschools. The comparison between international and non-international preschools indicated that both types of preschools could be positioned in similar areas of the space and attended by similar families. This suggests that even among those with immigration backgrounds, who might be presumed to have a “need” for international education,<sup>349</sup> some are also found in non-international schools. This implies more complex dynamics at play in choice practices. Furthermore, families that have been in the country for a substantial amount of time are shown to use both international and non-international preschools. This suggests that, despite their decreasing need for international education, some families still exhibit a desire to continue investing in international environments even when more rooted in the country.

When examining specific institutions and their language profiles, more distinct recruitment patterns emerged. Even within the group of preschools offering bilingual English provision, these institutions held different positions despite having similar pedagogic orientations. This variation can be explained by the possibility that English holds a more universal appeal and is perceived as valuable by families from diverse social backgrounds. Additionally, the geographic distribution of these preschools may influence their social positions.

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<sup>346</sup> E.g. Håkan Forsberg, Mikael Palme, and Börjesson, Mikael, ‘Empirical Investigations of Social Space’, in *Empirical Investigations of Social Space*, ed. Jörg Blasius et al. (Cham: Springer Nature, 2019), 245–66; Will Atkinson, ‘The Swedish Space of Lifestyles and Symbolic Domination’, *Social Science Information* 60, no. 1 (2021): 63–85.

<sup>347</sup> See Will Atkinson, *Beyond Bourdieu* (Cambridge, UK; Polity Press, 2016).

<sup>348</sup> E.g. Adams and Agbenyega, ‘Futurescaping?’, Hayden and Thompson, ‘International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future’.

<sup>349</sup> Brummit and Keeling, ‘Charting the Growth of International Schools’, 25.

It is plausible to suggest that the choice of these preschools may be rooted in socio-geographically shaped parenting cultures, where the local preschool offerings and demographics of families interplay.<sup>350</sup> However, such deductions demand further exploration through qualitative material.

The Somali preschools were shown to tend to cater to families with lower levels of educational and economic resources. In contrast, French and German preschools predominantly served those with greater educational and economic resources. Hence, the chapter underscores how different forms of internationality translate into specific classed practices and how global language hierarchies play out, even in particular in local spaces.

Through the analysis of the space, coupled with the interpretation of over and underrepresentations of migration characteristics and children's backgrounds, it becomes apparent that studying educational choices based on family units roots these decisions in the main social structures between families. However, while this approach is valuable, it tends to overshadow the internal dynamics within families, such as having one parent who is Swedish and the other foreign-born. These internal family structures were revealed to be associated with the choice of international preschool, particularly for certain languages. This suggests that, for presumably multilingual families, the continued investment in specific languages over others becomes more critical, especially in contexts where the option of international preschools offering particular languages exists. Thus, this chapter emphasises the necessity for research on international education and educational choices at a general level to consider the influence of distinct differences among parents within families, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how these dynamics translate into educational choices for their children.

The thesis now shifts its focus to the qualitative material, specifically the interviews conducted with families whose children attend international preschools. However, the analysis of this chapter is not left behind; rather, it is integral to the qualitative analyses. The interviewees themselves can be examined as individuals within this space, embedded within the social structures it reveals. Appendix D illustrates the social positions of the interviewees within this space, which is utilised in the analysis of the interviews.

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<sup>350</sup> Holloway, 'Local Childcare Cultures'.

## Traversing the National and International

This is the first of three chapters that explore how 36 predominantly middle-class families experienced and navigated the preschool landscape, a process that resulted in them opting for an international preschool. The social structures of this preschool landscape were revealed in the previous chapter, with the social positions of individual preschools determined by the characteristics of the families attending them. International preschools, whilst not confined to a specific space in this structure and not solely catering to one social group or fraction, each had their own distinct social recruitment. Thus, it became clear that the main hierarchies and distinctions between families, when studied as units, did not simply translate to particular educational choice patterns. Instead, attending an international preschool was argued to be the result of more complex dynamics, the more specific constellations of family characteristics in interplay with the variation of meanings ascribed to international preschools in different socio-geographic areas.

This chapter is dedicated to examining how families constructed and managed ideas of “national” and the “international” in their navigation of the preschool landscape and how this process shaped their choice to enrol their children at international preschools. The chapter, which draws on 36 interviews with parents whose children attend one of eighteen<sup>351</sup> international preschools with either an English, French, or Somali orientation, has two main intersecting themes.

The first theme explores how parents perceive the content of education in international preschools as distinct from those without international orientations. Research concerning preschool choice on a general level illustrates that the middle classes have a tendency to value early years institutions they believe to focus on cognitive and academic development.<sup>352</sup> Within the literature on international schools, it is widely suggested that international education, often catering for the middle classes, is perceived as a symbol of quality, with the level and content of education constructed by parents as superior.<sup>353</sup> This chapter brings together these two perspectives, showing how parents’ perceptions of early years education,

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<sup>351</sup> Only sixteen of these eighteen were captured in the analysis in the previous chapter, which will be later addressed.

<sup>352</sup> E.g. Johansen, Leibowitz, and Waite, ‘The Importance of Child-Care Characteristics to Choice of Care’.

<sup>353</sup> E.g. Alfaraidy, ‘Factors Influencing Saudi Parents’ Choice of International Schools in Saudi Arabia’; Windle and Maire, ‘Beyond the Global City’.

based on not only their relative social positions but also their experiences in other national contexts, converge with constructions of the national and the international in the Swedish preschool context.

The second theme addresses how perceptions of the national come to the fore as a result of non-Swedish parents' limitations in activating their capital,<sup>354</sup> in particular cultural capital, in their daily interactions in Sweden. These experiences are argued to contribute to shaping their beliefs that nationally orientated education is not suitable for their families. Collectively, these analytical points emphasise that the choice of international preschool is not exclusively determined by the possession of particular aggregated social characteristics. Instead, the nuances within such categories, as well as parents' experiences of whether their social characteristics are recognised, play a pivotal role in the navigation of their children's preschool education. Whilst the analysis is based on the interview material, the social positions that families hold in relation to one another and within the wider social structures captured in Chapter Five are employed (see Appendix D).

## Care and Education in a Unitary System

Choosing a preschool is a significant milestone in parenthood as it is the first instance of parents making institutionalised educational choices for their children. It marks a pivotal shift in the responsibility of raising a child, expanding it from primarily a family affair to encompassing Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings and later schools.<sup>355</sup> This shift is rooted in policies shaping parenting cultures and expectations regarding ECEC on a national level. Through the interviews with parents, it became evident that divergent experiences arise from two distinct aspects of Swedish preschool provision, highlighting the intrinsic role of familiarity with the nationally regulated organisation and form of preschool in determining how individuals experience and navigate this educational landscape.

On the one hand, there are the cultures concerning the state's involvement in young children's upbringing. Sweden, like other Nordic countries, is distinct in its extended parental leave being tied to the publicly funded ECEC system, where most children attend at age two.<sup>356</sup> On the other hand, there is the form of this provision, where in the unitary system, preschools offer a more holistic educate approach compared to countries with split system traditions that have undergone a more prominent schoolification, such as The United States, United Kingdom,

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<sup>354</sup> Unn-Doris Karlsen Bæck, 'School as an Arena for Activating Cultural Capital – Understanding Differences in Parental Involvement in School', *Nordic Studies in Education* 25, no. 3 (2005): 217–29 Argues for not only studying the possession of capital but also individuals' abilities in activating it in pinnacle social interactions.

<sup>355</sup> Korsvold, 'Dilemmas over Childcare in Norway, Sweden and West Germany after 1945'.

<sup>356</sup> Around half of one year old's are enrolled at preschool and at two years old 93 percent of children with Swedish background attend, 86 percent of Swedish born children with two foreign-born parents and a lesser 63 percent of children born abroad. Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), 'Barn och personal i förskola - Hösten 2021' (Skolverket, 2022), 10.



and France.<sup>357</sup> Information of and feeling at ease with these bureaucratic structures can be regarded as cultural capital, which the interviews highlighted that for those lacking, led to difficulties in coming to terms with the Swedish system as a whole and influenced how families navigated both the preschool choices for their children and their planned trajectories.

As the interviewed parents already had at least one child attending preschool, they had all undergone the process of discovering Sweden's regulations and cultures of ECEC. However, their descriptions and stories concerning their initial encounters with ECEC diverged; some gave the impression of having innate knowledge, whilst others recounted how they had learnt by mistake or clashed with the Swedish model. Although having a more intrinsic relationship to ECEC structures can be attributed to having a Swedish background, as it is through socialisation that these cultural norms are inculcated, such a division of Swedish or foreign background does not capture the complexities. Instead, the interviews suggest that the time living in the country and whether parents had experiences with other countries' ECEC systems shaped their encounters in the Swedish context.

The Swedish-born parents, in particular, those who had also been living in the country before having children, did talk of preschool as an "extended upbringing" for their children, where at a certain age, relative to the exhaustion of their parental leave, preschool would become an institution that assumed a key role in the caring of their young children. However, the non-Swedish parents were not exempt from this perspective if they had resided in the country for some time. For example, Casho, who had lived in Sweden for over ten years and had educated herself to become a teacher in the country, explained that she wanted to "keep them longer", referring to staying at home with her child. "But you have just... one year to be at home... then you must go back to work", referring to the structure of parental leave and preschool provision, which accepts children from age one. Even enquiring about whether these parents had discussed not enrolling their children was often met with surprise. It was "natural" for these parents that their children would attend preschool from a young age. Not only is time spent in the country influential here, but also social class. Despite having foreign backgrounds, which is associated with lower enrolment rates in preschool,<sup>358</sup> these families who are more established in the country and belong to the middle classes, exhibited that they had absorbed the dominant ECEC practices.<sup>359</sup>

Concerning those who had been in the country a shorter amount of time before having their children, a number explained that they had not understood the rules regarding parental leave and preschool enrolment. Instead, they learned through their direct attempt to interact with the bureaucratic system. Basing their assump-

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<sup>357</sup> European Commission, 'Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing All Our Children with the Best Start for the World of Tomorrow' (Brussels: European Commission, 2011).

<sup>358</sup> Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education), 'Barn och personal i förskola - Hösten 2021'.

<sup>359</sup> They present similar practices to that of the Swedish middle classes. See Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, 'Varför går barnen inte i förskolan? Intervjusvar från vårdnadshavare som valt att stanna hemma med sina barn', Forskningsrapport i förskoledidaktik (Stockholm: stockholms universitet, 2022).

tions of the Swedish system on their experiences in other countries, they attempted to lean on the information gleaned from their home countries and transpose it to the Swedish context. For example, Naomie, a French mother who was accustomed to the possibility of accessing ECEC from birth as parental leave policies cover only shorter stays at home, “didn’t know... that you have to wait until the child is one year old”. Her assumption that the Swedish system would mirror that of France led her to phone the municipality’s educational department to request a preschool place for her six-month-old, a service not part of Sweden’s typical provision. “I got a very impolite answer, something like ‘you’re the parent, you have to take care of your child, so you stay home until they’re one”, she explained.

Her story highlights a clash of early years cultures, where her beliefs concerning raising her young child and her attempts to do the best for her child by searching for an environment where her child would get “more development” were called into question by the structures of early years provision in Sweden that inculcate specific values and practices of early childhood. Such experiences, in combination with general feelings that “Sweden was very Swedish”, feed into parents’ constructions of whether they belong to the dominating culture and that of their Swedish social counterparts.

Not only did the eligibility age for publicly funded preschool placements in Sweden pose a challenge to recently immigrating families, but so did the unitary structure of ECEC. Sweden’s unitary structure, where care and education for all children between the ages of one and five is provided in the same institutions, was also a feature new to many of these families. Parents accustomed to split systems, where the demarcation between care and education aligns with children’s ages and is evident in public funding and class-oriented parenting cultures,<sup>360</sup> were taken aback by the Swedish practice of enrolling young children into what they perceived as daycare.

Whilst some parents, like Naomie, anticipated their children being able to start preschool as early as they wished, accustomed to this service being available from birth, others had planned later starts, aligning with a perceived transition from care to education. Ophelia, for example, had relatively recently moved to Sweden with her American partner and their young child. She had been the primary carer for their child, and if they had remained in their home country, they would have chosen to enrol their child in preschool at an older age. She explained, “if I hadn’t moved to Sweden, I probably wouldn’t have had her in [pre]school until she was at least three”. Her mention of wanting to stay home with her child until they were at least three was particularly telling. Age three is frequently the point of division in split systems and the separation of children’s care and educational needs.

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<sup>360</sup> Janna van Belle, ‘Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and Its Long-Term Effects on Educational and Labour Market Outcomes’, Research Reports (RAND Europe, 2016); Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal, ‘Early Childhood Policies and Systems in Eight Countries’ (Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2016).

In America, both her past practices and those of her social counterparts typically involved mothers staying at home; “it was... the culture... if you can stay with them you do”, rather than “hav[ing] somebody else raise my kid if I could be home seeing all the milestones”. Georgia, from southern Europe, resonated in a similar way, speaking of early years provision as being separated into two phases, “nursery” for young children and “preschool” for the older, with the content of these differing. “Why [would I] leave my children in a nursery?” she said, expressing her distaste for this type of childcare provision for young children. “Where I am from, people have a nanny... the nanny takes the child to the playground where he can socialise, and then he goes home with his toys, and then there’s a play date...”. However, in Sweden, they both found themselves in a situation where “all the kids were gone during the day because they were in preschool” and “there was nothing to do”. Despite their classed practices of childcare differing, practices they attributed to being simply the norms of their countries, both shared similar beliefs of avoiding institutionalised ECEC for young children. In the Swedish context, they both found that their childcare cultures clashed with the Swedish middle class, meaning they had to turn to preschools. Whilst they suggest they turned their attention to international preschools due to the particular provision they offer, it can also be inferred that their sense of disconnection from Swedes, despite social similarities on a class level, influenced their avoidance of non-international preschools.

## Buying One’s Way Out of the Swedish Model

The unitary structure of Sweden’s preschool provision emerged as a source of conflict for a number of the non-Swedish parents, particularly those whose prior experiences with ECEC in other countries conflicted with those they encountered in Sweden. This is underscored by the unique role of preschool in Sweden as a key institution in the welfare state, presenting a challenge for these well-resourced non-Swedish parents. However, not all these families had to fully accustomise themselves to the Swedish system. It is, in fact, possible for them to opt out of this model, provided they are inclined towards a specific form of internationality. In Stockholm, there are two preschools that operate independently of the Swedish preschool system, both of which are international preschools and offer particularly distinct provision.

These two preschools could not be captured in the analyses in Chapter Five as they function outside of the ECEC system and are, therefore, not included within the register data covering children in preschool. As a staff member in one of these preschools explained, they do not gain any form of public funding, meaning, “as far as they [the Swedish educational authorities] are concerned, we don’t exist”. It is, therefore, not possible to accurately describe the social backgrounds of the families whose children attend these preschools nor empirically understand how these preschools are positioned in relation to the social structures of families.

However, the interviews with pedagogical staff from these settings provide some insights, albeit only regarding their perceptions of the families. Although these two preschools have somewhat different profiles and recruitment (according to staff), they share many commonalities compared to publicly funded preschools. Thus, to uphold the anonymity of the staff and parents interviewed at these preschools, they are constructed as one preschool for the analysis.

These preschools are run by fee-charging international schools, which are termed international in educational law and provided with certain exemptions from the Education Act to facilitate the movement of highly skilled international mobility into the country.<sup>361</sup> The interviews with staff suggest that these preschools are feeders to these schools, catering for affluent families who often tend to reside in the country for short periods. One staff member explained that at their preschool, “it’s probably about two-thirds of the families are on a traditional expat contract, which is about two and a half to three and a half years” and that they believed that for “the vast majority” of families, the fees are “paid for by their companies or embassies”. Families’ economic affluence was suggested as indicated by “the clothes they wear, the brands”, and “where they live”, in costly neighbourhoods. Moreover, staff mentioned that sometimes the families in their preschool have “a full-time nanny”, further illustrating their resources and lifestyles.

When responding to questions regarding which institutions they competed with over the enrolment of children, it was apparent that these staff members perceived their preschools as separate from publicly funded international preschools. Their education was tailored to particular migrant groups constructed as distinct from those limited to navigating the publicly funded sector. Consequently, they presented their provision as education for those who could not afford to engage with the publicly funded options – families for whom the Swedish education system could not adequately cater. Instead, the notion was presented as logical: migrant families with access to the economic means needed to cover fees could choose to enrol their children in these preschools, effectively opting out of the Swedish model.

However, the interviews with parents attest to the factors driving highly skilled migrant families opting for these preschools being far from solely economic. Rather, these decisions were shaped by how they perceived their positions within the social structures of their new national context and within envisioned international spheres, both of which reflect in their perceptions concerning the form of ECEC their children should receive. This will be addressed in the following section.

## An Internationally Framed Early Years Education

These two fee-charging preschools differ in a number of ways from those that are a part of the publicly funded system. As well as their substantial fees, they use almost entirely the English language, do not follow the Swedish preschool cur-

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<sup>361</sup> Svensk författningssamling (SFS), Skollag (2010:800).

riculum, and only accept children from the age of three. While they present an educare ideology, their policies regarding age and the focus of their pedagogic content illustrate their unique views of care and education. These preschools position themselves as part of an imagined split ECEC system in which they offer education to older children. One staff member described how they presented their setting to prospective parents.

When the parents come for tours, it's explaining what we're all about, particularly in the early years and very much then leaving it up to the parents to decide if that's the right place for them. We're not daycare, and we do explain that to them, so if they choose to come here, we recommend that the children come full-time. We don't have part-time places, we do expect them to get on board with things like our induction schedule when the children first start, the fact that it is a learning focus, and also we don't have, children have to be toilet trained before they come here, which is actually largely due to the facilities, we don't have the facilities for nappies. But very much explaining our ethos to parents and encouraging them to think about is this what they want. If they just want daycare or the ability to pull children in and out, take them for a day out... if they're not interested in developing those independence skills or the learning, it's probably not the place for them. If they're not going to value the learning through play and the outdoor learning... and the fact they're coming home messy, it's equally not really the right place for them. So, we never try and pressure parents on tours because what's the point really, if it's not the right place for them, it's not the right place for them.

Daycare is placed in opposition to that offered in their preschool, with even the choice of term telling, *daycare*. Children in nappies, parents who want part-time places or the ability to take their children out for the day, and parents not following the induction schedule are inconducive to the learning environment they promote at their preschool. Instead, these characteristics of early years provision are constructed as belonging to the realm of care, and in doing so, the staff member distances themselves and their preschool. They present a desire for parents who recognise their provision as educational and use children's toilet training to symbolise their readiness for the preschool's more academic focus.

The division between care and education that the staff members presented clashes with the Swedish model of unitary ECEC. They can be seen as sharing certain principles of Swedish early years pedagogy; however, they tended to position themselves within the globally dominating early years play-based philosophy rather than associating such practices as characteristic of Sweden's educare model. Moreover, within the interviews, it was more common that they compared their settings to other countries' ECEC. In comparison to other countries with "rigid systems", where "parents from certain countries were expecting their kids to write perfectly" or "do so much more", their setting was more child-centred. These values of their specific form of care and education were reproduced by parents. However, what stood out amongst the parents was their inclination to highlight Sweden when comparing these preschools to international spheres and other countries.

Three of the interviewed families highlighted that they had the economic possibility to enrol their children at one of these preschools,<sup>362</sup> and two had chosen to attend them. These three families had moved to Sweden due to the father's highly skilled employment in international organisations and companies. In two cases, their employer offered to pay the preschool's fees directly. For the other family, their salary negotiation included "that there was going to be a cost associated" with their child attending international education in Sweden. When inspected relationally, both through the interview material and in the space of families, it becomes apparent that in comparison to many of the other interviewees, these three families are not distinct; they have similar economic and educational resources. This suggests that the possibility of attending these preschools is not tied to only their possession of economic or educational capital. Instead, it is their employment that plays a crucial role in facilitating access to these institutions, indicating that the opportunity structure to this form of internationality is tied to non-educational organisations.<sup>363</sup>

Despite there being just a few families in the interview population that engaged with these private preschools, and only one of them opting against such provision for their child, some apparent differences can be deduced in how they resonated about notions of education for young children. These concern the age of their children, their plans for staying in Sweden, children's previous educational experiences, and families' mobility backgrounds. These aspects are demonstrated to intersect with family resources, particularly those of a transnational nature.

Georgia, along with Harry and Isabel (these latter two parents make up one family), had chosen to send their children to private international preschools, reasoning that their children needed a more formal education style than available in publicly funded Swedish preschools. Harry and Isabel based this on their child's previous, albeit brief, educational path, which had already encompassed more formal education. On the other hand, Georgia's rationale stemmed from a perceived need to adhere to the academic standards of international educational institutions.

Harry and Isabel's child, who was older than Georgia's when they moved to Sweden, had previously begun a "semi-structured" educational level in their home country and was said to have been thriving in the learning environment. They explained that their child was even "ahead of the curve"; he could already "read a book" and "loves writing so much, and reading, and he loves maths as well". In their eyes, the semi-structured educational style worked well for their child; they valued the academic success their young child had already achieved. Their move to Sweden was decided as only possible if their child could continue on a similar educational path. However, their child's age meant that in the Swedish system, where more formal education begins later, their child would have to

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<sup>362</sup> This is not to say that the other families did not have the economic resources to cover fees, such detailed information on their finances were not collected. However, when these preschools were mentioned, other families had either not known that they existed or dismissed them as being too expensive.

<sup>363</sup> cf. Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson, *Social Class and Transnational Human Capital*, 68–69.

attend preschool. Their issues with their young child's education centred around the lack of alignment between their home country's educational system and Sweden's; they would be unable to receive the academic continuation they desired. They explained that it was not "a very appealing prospect" to "put him back into preschool" as he would be "bored out of his brains", again pointing to their valuation of scholastic learning. This translated into a "main worry, that he would not be... well supported and pushed"; they did not want their child to attend a setting where "he wasn't doing that and then lost that automatic, that sort of innate love for those kinds of things".

By opting for a private international school, they could avoid what they deemed could be a step backwards in their child's learning and lust for learning that they had already developed through their short educational trajectory. Their fear of succumbing to the Swedish organisation of education can be seen as influenced by their careful planning of their family's future possibilities for returning home. At the time of the interview, they had only recently arrived in Sweden, and whilst they were not on a so-called expat contract, they were not "100 percent committing" to staying in Sweden. Harry had, when accepting his permanent contract, informed his employer, "it's going to be 2-3 years... because that's how we've [Harry and Isabel] been talking about it". They were renting out the house, a purchase they seemed unwilling to let go of due to its location to good schools and the fact that in the area, "houses don't come up for sale that often; people keep them for 25 years". Having already mapped out their lives and children's educational paths in their home country, they could not afford to immerse themselves in the Swedish educational model.

However, for their younger child, they could accept the educate model, albeit temporarily. In their home country, this child had only attended what they described as daycare, and when they were planning their move to Sweden, they "didn't actually start looking at options for [her]". They "sort of thought we'll sort it out", evidencing that their experiences in a more divided care and education tradition of ECEC could align with the provision they could find in Sweden, as long as their child only attended whilst they were in this early stage of ECEC. Harry explained that "the most important things for us at that age were that she was well looked after and you know ate well and all of that stuff...it was [a] nurturing environment, and she's safe", followed by Isabel furthering that "she's safe, and she feels safe, feels like a loving environment". Their distinct priorities for their children illustrate their perceptions of care and education and how these relate to the organisation of ECEC in their home country and Sweden. Having already become accustomed to their home country's education and care norms, they applied these in their ECEC choices in Sweden.

Although they primarily resonated about their educational decisions concerning the education and care needs relative to the age of children, and whether Swedish ECEC reflects these, it is deducible that they are also describing hierarchies between countries and languages. Sweden's education system and language hold lower symbolic worth globally than their home country. In the

Swedish context, they can pursue English-speaking education through international schools, which also carry symbolic worth on a global level, both in Sweden and their home country.

The same logic can be observed in how Georgia emphasised avoiding the Swedish system in favour of fee-charging international institutions. However, there is one clear distinction. For Harry and Isabel, the international preschools were not only international but also nurtured the culture, language, and educational organisation of their home country. Georgia saw these international institutions as a way to avoid local education; the international orientation was distinctly international, not offering an education, language, or culture of her home country. Instead, it was an institution for her children to acquire these internationally recognised characteristics. For Georgia, there was a clear separation between national education and international education, while for Harry and Isabel, international education closely resembled their national education.

The level of education was again the key point of comparison; Georgia felt that publicly funded preschools in Sweden did not offer her children the educational level they needed. She predominantly embedded her family in the international sphere, shaped by their cross-border mobility. They had moved countries numerous times due to partner's management position in international companies and had relocated to Sweden with the plan to stay just two years. Whilst she, like Harry and Isabel, compared education in Sweden to that of her home country, she was more focused on the educational cultures characteristic of international schools around the world. She explained:

People that move around are usually very high performers, highly educated, they are obsessed with education and they want this... they are not relaxed, like us, we are not relaxed people, I cannot see my children sitting all day and hugging... all day getting dressed for like an hour and then undressed and then dressed again... and then queuing, all the kids queueing to get outside, so you get dressed and then you wait for everybody else to get dressed, this can take an hour, so this is a shock for international people that come to Sweden.

Georgia positioned herself as belonging to a group of cross-border movers and contrasts this to “relaxed” Swedes, who are satisfied with the type of preschool education found in the publicly funded sector. The private international preschool that her oldest child attends<sup>364</sup> she termed “preschool” and elucidated that “there is a big difference between daycare and preschool”. At this preschool, she explained, there was a “pre-curriculum”, a “plan for the day”, and a “structure” that she claimed was not found in the publicly funded system.

The perceived need for a preschool over daycare is attributed by Georgia to the educational cultures of internationally mobile families like herself; “in cities

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<sup>364</sup> In commonality with Harry and Isabel, she had a child too young to attend the fee-charging international schools. Instead, this child was enrolled in the publicly funded sector whilst waiting to reach age of admittance.



where you get international people, like Hong Kong, New York, London, this is the standard". Thus, for her children's future educational paths, she needed to focus on early academic learning to keep up with the competitive norms of international schools. She believed that this could not be attained through publicly funded international preschools in Sweden, which she summed up with her description that "most of the day the kids hug with the teachers and then they eat the butter [and crackers], and then they dress, and then they eat the crackers and hug". In contrast, at the private preschool, she described that children "learn... you know there is an objective like... this month we're going to learn about water or about fish or transportation".

Although she strongly believed in more formal educational provision for her young children, she did provide glimpses of nuance. She explained that she was "lucky" that her partner's employer paid for the preschool, noting, "I don't think if I had to pay it by myself, I would". This indicates the influence of parenting and educational cultures, moulded by individuals' interactions in and with educational institutions. The "need" for competitiveness amongst these highly skilled migrant families, as shaped by the distinctive pedagogical approaches of these preschools, is reproduced within their group. The structure of this education is influenced by the expectations and norms of families from educational systems around the world. Consequently, the posed need to avoid national education due to language and certification disparities,<sup>365</sup> has evolved into a distinct educational culture, amongst those with the opportunity of access to this form of international preschool, that transcends national borders.

### Being International Enough for International Preschools

The extent of the influence of these particular cross-border educational cultures forged in this specific form of international preschool can be seen to depend on the degree to which families identify as belonging to international spheres and how they relate to the social structures of such arenas. The interview with Emma provides an example of how it is not solely the opportunity of access, along with other class-based and transnational assets, that drives the choice of these international preschools. Instead, her sense of not belonging to this international environment, can be seen as integral in her turning down the offer of these international preschools. This belongingness can be attributed to her loyalties to the public sector and the particularities of her social background. Emma and her partner have acquired transnational assets similar to those of others attending the fee-charging international preschools. They have spent time living in other countries due to her partner's employment, and now in Sweden, only planning to stay a couple of years, they were offered the possibility of having the fees for a private international preschool paid for during their stay.

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<sup>365</sup> Hayden, 'Transnational Spaces of Education'.

However, Emma wished for their child to avoid joining the “rat race” of education that was characteristic of this type of preschool. She preferred play-based learning and its focus on early years learning’s social and emotional side. Instead of opting for a private international preschool, she wanted to “buy into this lovely Swedish model” and enrol her child at a publicly funded international preschool. This decision, however, was seemingly not simple and not one she could fully trust, such as with many of the parenting choices of the middle class.<sup>366</sup> With a laugh indicating her exasperation and nervousness, Emma admitted that “he’d be two years behind” if they were to return home, as formal schooling begins at a younger age in their home country. Evidencing her worry about this, she furthered by saying, “I don’t know what to say about that”. Moreover, she described her child as liking “structure and focus and the academic activity” and explained that he “does not get much of that” at his publicly funded preschool. This led to a moment of panic, thinking “about that gap”. She seemed to grapple with the feeling of not quite meeting the ECEC needs of her child; neither the Swedish nor international model fitted their family. She seemed to want to believe in the Swedish ECEC culture but simultaneously worried that it was only suitable if “you’re going to leave them in that system forever”.

As well as avoiding the “rat race” of the private international preschool, her “social justice” morals kept her from believing in their educational provision. She had grown up in a middle-class family and attended a socially-mixed school she termed a “poor school”. She explained that other children “were sent further away” to schools in better areas, a practice she said to be “a problem”. “Schools need to be mixed and have different people from different backgrounds”, she explained, referencing different economic backgrounds, a characteristic fee-paying international preschools did not hold. The preschool her child attends is not so diverse, at least not in terms of social class. It has a rather central position within the MCA analysis in Chapter Five (see Appendix B),<sup>367</sup> with a relatively homogenous recruitment. The interview with Emma, others that attended the preschool, as well as the manager of the setting, illustrated that the families who enrol tend to be middle class (with both Swedish and foreign backgrounds) and living in the affluent neighbouring area. However, Emma justified the middle-class recruitment and not quite meeting her ideal of social diversity by saying that her preschool was not “selective” and that “anyone can get in”. It was still better in relation to the privileged recruitment of the fee-charging international preschools.

With a focus on economic resources as distinguishing “privileged” people, opting for a private preschool was against her values. She explained that even though “it’s maybe other people’s dream, to be able to move around the world and be in this lovely international schooling environment... I don’t want my

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<sup>366</sup> E.g. Ball, *Class Strategies and the Education Market*.

<sup>367</sup> The preschools are not named in the figures within this appendix to ensure no interviewees were identifiable. However, the preschool Emma’s child attends is one of the English-speaking settings in the found towards the middle of the space in all planes.

child to only see other people like them”. Emma’s views can be understood by her more limited belief in the power of transnational assets, shaped by her investments in the public sector in her home country. In comparison to Georgia and Harry and Isabel, Emma and her partner held similarly secure resources; however, Emma and her partner are more tied to the public sector (see Appendix D).<sup>368</sup> Although her partner had a public sector position requiring international travel, she experienced a separation from those more associated with the private sector, often characterised by higher economic affluence. Emma said,

I don’t think I would live abroad if I hadn’t met [my partner], I don’t think so, I wasn’t, I’m not, I really like this life, I’m really glad I’ve been exposed to it, but I don’t think I had that, I didn’t have that desire, he travelled... you know, he was that kind of kid, [that] really wanted to see the world, went off by himself, he’s really that kind of guy, I wouldn’t have done that.

She seemed somewhat split about her mobile life with a young child. They needed international education for their child but did not want to surround their children with the most economically advantaged or the form of education linked to these groups. She morally opposed this type of preschool for her child despite acknowledging it sometimes being the only possible option due to not being, or wanting to be, fully submerged within a family trajectory of professional mobility. She rejected the values that she perceived it stood for, seemingly early academic learning and social isolation.

The comparison of Georgia and Emma illuminates how their constructions of themselves in relation to this “international” group and life can also be understood in relation to their planned trajectories for their families and the degree to which they rooted themselves in international spheres. Whilst Emma was not at home in this privileged mobility, especially since having children, for Georgia, it was both the norm of her adult life and a value passed down from her parents. One of Georgia’s parents was bilingual, and the other, whilst having no inherited transnational assets as such, educated themselves abroad and dreamt that their children would become “more international”. In her childhood, she was “exposed to foreign families that were well-off”, and her parents encouraged her to “go international”. On the other hand, Emma had a more local childhood and, having invested in a nationally-rooted occupation as an adult, could not buy into the international educational approach nor fully what she constructed to be an international life.

Perceptions of what constitutes legitimate belonging in international spheres extended to families who were aware of these international preschools but did not deem them a viable option. Not only Georgia and Emma seemed to relate their

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<sup>368</sup> They can be seen to hold similar positions along the first axis but in regard the second axis, Emma is found securely within the area of the highly educated public sector families and Georgia, and Harry and Isabel to the bottom of the space where private sector affluent families are located (Figure 18). Similar patterns are found in Figure 20, where the second and third axes intersect and Emma is located separately to Georgia and Harry and Isabel.

constructions of themselves as “international” to whether buying out of the Swedish ECEC system was suitable for their children and family. For example, Claire, a mother who has lived in Sweden for over ten years and described herself as “international”, spoke of these private international preschools despite them not being an option they considered. She called herself a “chameleon”, furthering with “I very much adapt to my environment, and that’s what one does”, illustrating her views on what she classes as a legitimate “international”.

Claire: I know that there are some private schools...here in Stockholm, there are two schools you pay for... [they’re] sort of completely independent from anything Swedish, so that’s why they get around it, I don’t, I would never send my children there basically.

Jenny: Because of the fees or?

Claire: Because we are, we’re living here, we’re paying taxes here, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t, you know, reap the benefits of what our society provides for us, we’re not expats, we’re not living in a bubble, expatriation, we live here, we’re rooted, I mean in that sense of being rooted means that you have to be part of the society a bit and a part of what society offers you...

J: So, do you think those schools are more people in like expat bubbles?

Claire: Very much so, they are huge expat bubbles, and people come and go, and that’s what people complain about with these schools, “oh, it’s lovely, but my children have lost their friends over the years”, what do you expect you’re sending your children to one of these bubble schools. But they themselves, a lot of my friends who have children there, they are saying they’re not sure if they’re staying here so that’s why they want them, I would say, it’s bubbles, but the worrying thing is that more and more Swedish families that are rooted here are starting to think to consider the option of sending their children there, they don’t mind that there is no [after school club provision] in the schools because they all have nannies (laughs) to pick up their children, it’s a different world, and also there are so many more families here in Stockholm that can afford it, that have that level of income and can afford it and the reason these Swedish families are sending their children there are, I don’t know, it’s a feel-good thing, they think they’re paying for education so they feel they are getting something back, which is very un-Swedish.

Similarly to Emma, Claire equates the private international preschools to the practices of an economically affluent group, but distinctly, she frames them as selling internationality rather than nurturing it. She defends her perception of being international as being rooted in new national contexts, opposing affluent Swedes who try to take shortcuts to become international. In essence, Georgia, Emma, and Claire illustrate how parents shape perceptions of their own national and international belonging in relation to ECEC pathways that are either nationally rooted or embedded in international arenas.

Similar processes were even found to occur when parents navigated their options within the publicly funded ECEC system. The following part of this chapter is dedicated to this and explores how parents manage their perceptions of what is national and international in the publicly funded sector.

## Boundaries Between Swedish and International

The majority of the families' preschool choices were confined to the publicly funded system. Even Georgia's and Harry and Isabel's younger children were in publicly funded international preschools whilst they waited to come of age for admission. All preschools in this system, whether they have an international orientation or not, follow the Swedish curriculum and should offer at least half of their provision in the Swedish language.

For the most part, families limited their parameters of choice to institutions offering a specific language or non-international preschools. Only a few of the families were interested in international preschools offering different languages. In these instances, families either had multiple languages spoken at home or their children had attended preschools in other countries where a language different from their home language was spoken. However, it should be noted that even among families with multiple languages spoken at home, which were also available in preschools, they often preferred institutions that exclusively offered one of these languages. These families had already decided on the specific form of internationality they favoured for their children's preschool environment.

Families limiting their options to preschools offering English tended to be the ones who predominantly referred to their preschools as international. Their perceptions of what belonged to the realms of national and international appeared to shape their navigation of the preschool landscape. These families frequently articulated a dichotomy between the two, positioning international in contrast to Swedish. In doing so, they often simplified the diverse preschool landscape into a binary choice between Swedish and international options. These categorisation processes were intricately linked to their experiences in Sweden and their interactions within the preschool landscape. Many of the families "had to decide...should we do, international or not?". This navigation involved identifying themselves in relation to the Swedish-international dichotomy and assessing whether elements of what they considered "Swedish" or "international" preschools aligned with their families and children's needs.

## Encounters with Swedish Cultures and Language

In this section, the focus is on non-Swedish parents whose children attend English international preschools. Despite the prevalence of English-speaking international preschools, their numbers remain relatively limited. Considering

that families typically choose preschools in close proximity to their homes,<sup>369</sup> and many municipalities request parents to list preferred preschools, the geographical distribution of English preschools meant that even families wanting to avoid entirely Swedish environments also contemplated non-international options. However, a significant number of these families expressed reluctance toward the idea of their children attending a non-international preschool. This reluctance can be attributed to their perceptions of Swedish people and Swedish culture, which their experiences in the country have shaped.

Descriptions of what characterised Swedes were common in the interviews with non-Swedish parents. At times, they expressed exasperation concerning their attempts to comprehend what they perceived as characteristic of the new culture they were navigating. They conveyed a sense that they had anticipated a smooth process of fitting in and belonging, reflecting their privileged social backgrounds and particular forms of migration. However, they discovered that there were more differences between themselves and their social counterparts than they had initially expected. These differences extended to cultures concerning raising children, which some parents explicitly identified as assumedly prevalent within the pedagogical approaches of preschools.

This notion can be exemplified by Ophelia, who was previously discussed in this chapter concerning her discovery of Sweden's lack of stay-at-home mothering culture. She expressed how Swedish child-reading styles differed from her own and thus shaped her belief that it would be within international preschools that she would find provision more fitting with her values. She explained,

Another thing is like discipline. I mean... I'm not talking like, you know, beating a child or anything like that, but I'm okay with a certain level of, like, discipline, you know, if you do something that's bad, you get a time out or whatever, and from what I've been told, that's approached differently here in Sweden. For me, I, I find it important, for me discipline is, it's not necessarily discipline, it's just creating like, it's teaching them how to behave so that they don't go into society and have no consideration for others or are jerks or, you know, they can engage socially without, and understand boundaries and that actions have consequences, whereas from what I've been told, I haven't seen it first-hand, But from what I've been told, that doesn't really happen as much to my understanding, and I wouldn't want my kid enrolled somewhere where they could just be on a free-for-all all the time, because I want to give them those tools to be successful and engage with other people... I witnessed, I was at a tech museum once with a group of moms, and one of the mom's daughters came over crying... and these three little girls came over and said something to the little girl in Swedish, it was kind of like a three-on-one scenario, and the mom was standing there and they said it, it sounded nasty, I couldn't tell, but they said it to the girl in front of the mom, like no fear of the fact that there was an adult standing there. And then when the mom stepped in and said something, they looked her dead in the eye and just, like, clicked it right back. And ... I was like, "What just happened?" And she turned to me, and she's like, "These kids, they just don't, they're not taught to respect

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<sup>369</sup> Fjellborg and Forsberg, 'Commuting Patterns of Preschool Children in Metropolitan Stockholm'.

authority". She's like, "it's horrendous" and she's from [European country]. So I don't know how different the culture is there... I'm not advocating for child abuse, but I think discipline is something that's important for me. And I've been told that it's not so likely in the Swedish schools.

Jenny: Is it, is this something you thought about, like when you were choosing a preschool or was this something you sort of discovered over time?

Ophelia: To me, to me, it kind of went hand in hand with the selecting something on the more international, maybe more American because international, you know that could be a mixed bag... but in in more of an American based school... not that our current school is, but it was as close as I was going to get at her age, it was a factor for me in wanting some level of structure in terms of that.

She applied her experiences of Swedish children and stories from friends concerning culture in "Swedish schools" to what she assumed would occur in preschools. She held onto her values of discipline, which she felt were characteristic of her home country. This perceived clash in ideals drove her to find a social environment for her child that she felt would reflect the upbringing she was giving her child at home, providing an example of how individuals attribute specific behaviours to national cultures and how this process is anchored in social interactions. Although she was "witness" to such behaviours, her friend put forward the interpretation of the situation she described. They reproduced a symbolic grouping in which, as non-Swedes, they maintained a sense of separation from Swedes and their cultural norms. In doing so, they reinforced their justifications for favouring preschool environments that they perceive as catering to their non-Swedish group and shared values.

The significance of cultural belongingness in shaping parents' preschool decisions for their children extends beyond those with limited experience and understanding of Swedish culture. Even some non-Swedish parents who felt at home in Sweden had good experiences with Swedes and had acquired nation-specific resources, such as mastering the language, gave the impression that they still felt some level of disconnect from their Swedish counterparts. Swedes were said to not "really get what it's like to not be from here" and understand the specific challenges that they faced, even if these were relatively minor for those living in the country for many years. "International" friends could truly understand, especially regarding the experience of having children in a foreign country. One American mother, Dee, described her first contact with the international preschool where she later enrolled her child,

I mean everything was just so, so kind and so much more, so much more than the Swedish way, and there's nothing wrong with the Swedish way, I like that sometimes but it was just genuinely, you know, "when you have kids, you make sure you find a good school, this is the way we work, it'd be lovely to meet you, and please bring [your child]", and very kind and outwardly caring, more caring than in a Swedish school where they're like "the government pays for it, and you

can drop your kid off, and they will receive food and play and have an education and”, but you don’t really talk to anyone, there’s no real caring... so we signed up for the school because I had a gut feeling that this was going to be right for us... I just felt like, for the first time since I moved here a long long time ago, here’s a group of people that I can relate to in a different way. I have wonderful Swedish friends here, but this was different.

Amongst the non-Swedish parents, typically only those who struggled to feel at home in the country and were not planning long-term stays in Sweden, a behaviour frequently attributed to being a characteristic of Swedes was coldness. These parents expressed that it was not possible to build social networks or strong friendships with Swedes. Swedish people were said to be “a little bit more cold” and “hard to make a connection” with. “A lot of them, you know... they see you and they just put their heads down because they are like ‘do not make eye contact with me’”. Many described their unsuccessful attempts to make contact, suggesting that Swedes were scared of the consequences of being friendly, “I’m just going to say hello... I’m not going to invite myself for coffee at [your] place”.

These attempts at short everyday interactions coloured their more concrete experiences of trying to build genuine connections, which many discovered was much easier if they kept to “international” circles. For example, Viktor and Wendy, recounted their failures of building relationships with Swedish parents. They had thrown a party and invited their neighbours but the “only ones who showed up... from our building” were a couple, one of whom was not Swedish. They attributed this to Swedish people being “a little bit closed”; however, it was apparent that linguistic skills were also intrinsic to their experiences. Viktor, who had greater skills in communicating due to his abilities in a similar Scandinavian language, had learned to somewhat circumvent some of the issues they attributed to cultures. He explained,

You can have your kids playing in the playground, and you have the parents standing around not talking to each other unless you’re friends from before... but I noticed that if you’re in the sandbox with their kid and you start talking to another parent’s kid, that parent will be more open towards you. So basically, I do that, I get down on all fours in the sandbox, and I start playing around with the kids, and all the children, like everyone gets a shovel and you have to share and all that. And when other parent sees that, they sort of, they’re more open to talking with me than if I were just standing outside looking at the kids playing. So you sort of have to work a little bit in order to meet other kids’ parents, so to speak.

Although his successes were recognised by Wendy, she attributed these to the norms of Viktor’s country being “the same”; he had a cultural closeness to Swedes that she did not, regardless of linguistic abilities. Wendy viewed herself and her cultural norms of interaction as less compatible with Swedes. Her difficulties with the Swedish language exasperated these. Still, she tended to demote the impact of her linguistic deficiencies, instead highlighting the clash of cultures. “for me,



it never happens, I don't socialise really... I know I'm going to hit a wall, so I don't really bother socialising". Like many non-Swedish parents, she had given up on her attempts to make new friendships with Swedes, instead focusing on "international" families and was more at home in international preschools.

These families suggested a belief that Swedes should be welcoming and drive social interactions. Essentially, they illustrated an embodiment of their privileged positions; their own or partners' established careers facilitated or drove their migration, and they could enter middle-class occupations in Sweden. However, despite their social positions, they discovered that they faced obstacles to succeeding in daily aspects of life in Sweden, most of which fell on their lack of knowledge of the Swedish language. Rina, who has lived in Sweden for quite some years, can exemplify many of the non-Swedish parents who had not fully invested in the language. She expressed that she is not comfortable speaking Swedish. When asked if she found herself in situations where she needed to communicate in Swedish, she replied,

At work sometimes... I don't like speaking Swedish because the reaction of, it's kind of psychological, like, I feel like if I speak Swedish to Swedish speaking person it's not fair, come on, it's your mother tongue, and for me, it's not even my second language [laughs] and also quite early in studies of Swedish if you say something wrong, Swedish people's reaction they gave back to me was not nice, so that's why, I just refuse speaking Swedish because I don't want this reaction, and also so few people speak Swedish, so many people speak English, and I heard so many English variants, yes, then you feel okay, if I say something wrong I'm not the first one [laughs] And even like you [Jenny] are, like you are speaking natively, but I don't feel any barrier between me and you because I bet you have heard so weird English variants, you don't care. So few people speak Swedish, so if you speak uncommon Swedish, to the Swedish native person, it will be a different reaction.

Rina illustrates two perspectives here. Firstly, she suggests that Swedes have little experience communicating with learners of their language. "Uncommon" use of Swedish is met with negative responses in her view, unlike English amongst native English speakers. In forwarding this perspective, she constructs native Swedish speakers themselves as part of her linguistic troubles, a common thread in the interviews, albeit often taking different forms. Additionally, she rationalises her "psychological" reaction as the result of an unjust situation; she is linguistically dominated in Swedish-speaking environments with native speakers. Instead, she expects them to meet her in the middle by communicating in English, a language neither possesses native proficiency.

Negative experiences with linguistic situations, where these parents believed that Swedes should accommodate their lack of Swedish, contributed to parents' assessments of what preschool would be welcoming to their family. Even amongst those who had initially contemplated Swedish-speaking options, negative linguistic experiences during pre-application preschool tours (a common practice among these middle-class families) could quickly lead them to reject such

“Swedish” alternatives. For instance, Yasmin described their visits to preschools without international profiles that offered entirely Swedish-speaking environments.

We looked around what’s in the area and then just started visiting. And I think at the visit, at the visits, that’s when we kind of realised, “Okay, we need to be definitely in an international environment because of the kind of reactions that people gave you when you went to visit”. We went to visit like one [Swedish speaking] preschool, we went to visit and we were the first ones there and the teacher was really happy, she was not *happy* but she was like “oh, you speak English, okay”, so she started speaking English. And then the next people came and they heard us speaking English and they were like, “oh, we can continue in English”. But then she [the teacher] completely switched to Swedish. So it was kind of like, “*okay...*”, and then she completely ignored us and just was focusing on the people speaking Swedish and them. And we were just like, “okay, we’re going to leave then” because it was kind of like, yes, it was this was not a very welcoming situation. So we left and then another one also. It was like, you know sometimes it’s like a big group, and I understand I wouldn’t expect anybody to switch to English just for me. But some people were happy to say, “oh, do you mind if we do this in English?” And then they did it in English. That was fine. But then some of them said, “oh, I’m going to do it in Swedish. And if you have questions afterwards, you can ask me”... So that was like the decision for us to decide, “okay, then we will focus only on something that’s international”.

Again, whilst it was claimed that there was no expectation that these Swedish-speaking situations should accommodate them, embedded within Yasmin’s story, such as Rina’s interview, is an underlying and possibly unconscious belief that such Swedish-speaking situations should accommodate them. All the Swedes they had met could speak English, so they felt unwelcome and excluded when they did not accommodate their lack of Swedish. As aforementioned, this may relate to their social positions and their type of mobility; these families were typically highly trained employment migrants. Unlike other immigrant groups with fewer resources, they had little need for the Swedish language. The fact that they are not so occupationally vulnerable to their lack of Swedish can be seen as creating expectations that they do not need the language in their daily lives. They seemed to believe that all aspects of their life in Sweden could be “international”, or at least that it should be them that construct themselves as international rather than others seeing them as immigrants. These families, who were accustomed to having their international assets recognised, discovered that this worth was not universal. Instead, they lacked a vital resource in these environments. As such, parents identified themselves as lacking in what was deemed “Swedish”, both linguistically and culturally, opting instead to prioritise preschool environments where their “international” characteristics were recognised.

## Swedish Preschools as Homogenous Spaces

“Swedish” was also equated to a specific ethnicity. Opting for an international preschool was a strategy among those who perceived themselves as disadvantaged in Sweden’s ethnic hierarchies, aiming to access more ethnically heterogeneous environments. This strategy was, whilst relevant to many of the families across the geographic scope of the study and class hierarchy (albeit them being rather similar), most prevalent to those living in central Stockholm and with a child attending an English international preschool.

For these families, those concerned with being “different” felt that they were faced with a particularly homogenous context of “white kids and just over-privileged, rich brats” because “the city is pretty segregated”. All these families had at least one parent with a foreign background, and seeking out diversity in this geographic context was one of their priorities. One mother<sup>370</sup> explained her thoughts on finding a diverse social environment for her child within the city.

You know, diversity was also important... we would like [our child] to see children from other cultures as well, different skin colours and things like that. So I think the most likely would be in an international kind of preschool, in the area that we live in... And so I think it is important... to be in a... diverse community or diverse preschool, you know, where my child can see that there are people from different places, because she is different... there’s not a lot of different colour of people around here... you want to see yourself reflected... it is important for me that she’s able to see that people come from different countries, at least that. She will see that I am different, you know colour, to other people that she sees around her, a majority of the people... So, it is important that she understands that there’s different countries and different cultures and that people live differently.

Although the language offered by international preschools was important to these families, ethnic diversity was also necessary. They desired a “diverse” social environment for their child to counteract the homogeneity of their geographic context. International preschools were deemed the best way to avoid the homogeneity of “Swedish” preschools. They were assessed on the diversity of their social recruitment, with one parent describing how she had “sneaked around a little... you know in the park outside [laughs] and looked.... and I noticed the children... I was happy when I saw... that, I understood it was international in that way”. While these parents often belonged to what can be seen as a highly skilled mobile group, where cosmopolitan attitudes are valued,<sup>371</sup> they displayed more of a need for surrounding their children with diverse environments. Their feelings of need can be deduced as an illustration of the impact of global ethnic and cultural hierarchies that even impact resource-strong families with both national and international assets.

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<sup>370</sup> Names are omitted from this section of the chapter.

<sup>371</sup> Weenink, ‘Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital’.

Ethnic homogeneity was also associated with dominant cultural practices. Preschools that were “white” could be seen by non-Swedish parents as too “Swedish”. One mother explained that she had grown up in a more multicultural city and had lived abroad in other, more diverse areas. Stockholm was not as diverse in comparison, and as a non-Swede, she saw a risk that her child might be seen as different. She explained how this translated into her process of choosing a preschool,

When I came here, I found it extremely, you know, white and mainstream and, you know, everyone, it’s candy on the Saturday<sup>372</sup> and everyone watches *melodifestival*<sup>373</sup> and I thought there was no diversity. And I was a bit worried when I was pregnant that my daughter would be, once she goes to school, she would be the only one not doing like everyone is, maybe not talking as good Swedish or maybe not, you know, celebrating midsummer or not reading Astrid Lindgren I, didn’t want her to be the only one who was isolated. So I really felt strongly about having her in the international environment so that from the beginning she would be, you know, she would be surrounded by kids who are like her, as in not fully Swedish.

For these families, the choice of international preschool gave the impression of being a practice to avoid the cultural hierarchies of their socio-geographic context rather than an investment in cosmopolitan resources that are frequently equated to international schooling. These are concrete examples of how the process of preschool choice involves evaluations of the social characteristics of preschools rather than only aspects such as pedagogical offer, locale, and staff qualifications. Families are drawn to preschools with socially similar families, thus illustrating the reproducing nature of social recruitment.

### Educational Distinctions in the Publicly Funded Sector

Returning to notions of education, this section explores how parents navigating the publicly funded sector compared the offerings of international preschools to those of non-international preschools. As discussed concerning fee-charging international preschools, families navigated their wishes for the type of education and learning focus they desired for their children. A similar process was even apparent amongst publicly funded preschools, despite those with and without international orientations being required to follow the Swedish curriculum.

The dichotomy of “Swedish” and “international” concerning cultural norms was apparent regarding the characteristics of education. This division was predominantly reserved for those with children in English international preschools, which will be the focus of this section. However, the other languages

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<sup>372</sup> *Lördagsgodis* [Saturday-sweets] is a Swedish concept for limiting the consumption of sweets to one day a week, Saturdays.

<sup>373</sup> A televised Swedish music competition for choosing the country’s representative for Eurovision song contest.

of international preschools can be briefly addressed. Firstly, neither of the two parents with children in Somali preschools suggested that they saw any educational differences between their preschools and those without international orientations. This viewpoint, which was also shared by the staff members interviewed, implies that, likely influenced by global and local ethnic/racial hierarchies, they may not perceive themselves as part of an international sphere, despite having some comparable resources to the highly skilled migrant families enrolled in English international preschools.<sup>374</sup> Moreover, Somali-speaking educational provision is confined to preschools, with no available pathways for these families to access Somali-speaking schools. Consequently, they may limit their expectations for distinct educational provision at the preschool level.

Concerning those enrolled in a French international preschool, the majority tended to draw comparisons between French practices and Swedish approaches rather than framing it as a contrast between international and Swedish. For the most part, this concerned the educational difference between the French international preschool affiliated with the French fee-charging international school. All of these families had a direct connection to France, and this preschool was deemed to offer a more French than Swedish learning experience where it was a “little more structured”, with “more activities... it can be Science, Maths, French, Swedish”. For those families where moving to France was a possibility or who planned for their children to attend the French school, the preschool was valued for its academic focus. One family, who had negotiated that they would never move to a French-speaking country due to one of the parent’s lack of French, was less focused on forging this French educational focus. They suggested that the preschool was “a bit too rigid French style education, where you have children sitting at their table and the teacher almost like you’re in school already”. Thus, whilst these families at French preschools saw distinctions between French and “Swedish” preschools, their comparisons were made in relation to national French education rather than notions of “international”.

Returning to focus on those families with children attending English international preschools, parents typically recounted that their navigation of the preschool landscape began with reading websites and reviews. Many had begun by searching for international preschools. This was followed by visits, typically to both “Swedish” and “international” institutions. Frequently, non-Swedish parents “didn’t know what to expect”, especially those not acquainted with the unitary system, who could think it “a bit strange because you develop so much in that time. I don’t find it particularly positive to stay at the same place”. In these early stages, parents formed their perceptions on whether the type of education they would receive differed between these preschools. Some assessed early in this process that international preschools had different pedagogical content, “there were several languages on the wall... there was art and there was science and there were like instruments. There was really a lot of things to develop”. For

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<sup>374</sup> At least in Casho’s case.

most, the distinct educational advantage of international preschools was their language offer, which meant families ranked these higher in their applications in the hope of receiving a place.

The majority of the families did not initially receive a place in their favoured preschools, spots were limited, and waiting lists were long. Instead, the municipality offered them preschools they did not list on their applications, a system related to the municipality's legal responsibility to guarantee preschool provision within a specific time frame. In most cases, these were preschools run by the municipality, which were frequently termed by the parents as "assigned", "normal", or "Swedish" preschools. As they were the preschools that parents "got first", they were typically forced to accept them to enable their return to work or studies. They remained on the waiting lists for their favoured setting, with some not receiving a spot for up to one and a half years, depending on how oversubscribed they were.

How families felt about the assigned preschools varied, but most were unhappy. Characteristics of these preschools, such as their location and size, were mentioned as "exactly what I didn't want". However, for those who had firmly believed that international preschools were the sole suitable option for their children, primarily driven by their initial desire to steer clear of the prevalent Swedish culture and language, the primary concern shifted towards the pedagogical content offered by these designated preschools. Rina explained,

We got a random school that was close to our place... I didn't even visit that school. It was not on our list, so we got it as a guarantee school...so it was this classic way of, it was not so extreme as Waldorf school, where there were no toys, so there were some toys, they did some activities, but mainly they were outside, they spending most of the time outside. Kids were just running so [staff] just watching that they don't hurt themselves... but they spent a lot of time, just, I mean, when I was fetching my kid, especially in summer, he was sitting in the sandbox, in a cloud of dust.

She had compared and visited several preschools before sending in her application that prioritised international preschools, so she employed these experiences to evaluate her "guarantee" preschool once her child had begun attending. The level of education was a common thread between these families. Naomie, who like Rina and others, struggled with what they experienced at these preschools. She explained.

So first, when he was one, we got an automatic place at a municipal preschool for two months and it was extremely bad. I mean, it was just, it was a really bad place. He was there for two months... I was working... so we put [him] there because we had no choice. But I was honestly physically running to the preschool after my work to pick him up because I felt so bad that he was there, so it was just really not good... I would not call that a preschool... they were just making sure that [the children] don't get hurt, but [the staff] were just sitting on the floor next to the kids and just let them play, there was no interaction... I was very shocked, I

understood later that I think some preschool do that, but I was extremely shocked as a foreigner that when they had lunch, so we're talking 12–13 month-old babies, when they had lunch they were putting them naked, only keeping the diaper, because otherwise they get so dirty and it's just not good. So, all the kids were eating naked in diapers. And I'm like "could you teach them how to eat properly instead" and they were like "they're so little, it's okay". Just covered with food all over their body, and I'm just "teach them to use a spoon, I don't know, just teach them something".

Whilst the preschools assigned to these families can be assumed to be generally less favoured, evidenced by the availability of places, their close proximity to the residences of the families suggests they recruit families of potentially similar class backgrounds. Thus, it can be deduced these non-Swedish parents who were unsatisfied with these preschools are not socially dissimilar to those who attend them, indicating that their dissatisfaction may not be primarily linked to class distinctions. Instead, it became apparent through the interviews that the distinctly Swedish characteristics of the provision, such as the amount of free-play and outdoor learning, were intrinsic in these perspectives. "I think three hours every day they were outside, no matter how the weather is", one mother, Patricia, said laughing, which added further weight to her comment. The free-play learning philosophy of preschool was not fully recognised as a legitimate form of early education, especially not in comparison to international preschools, where, whilst still learning through play, children gained a more measurable skill – language.

### Blurring the Borders

The borders between international and Swedish amongst parents were not always clear-cut, even concerning whether they identified as migrants, internationals, expats, or even nationals. Throughout the interviews, non-Swedish parents, particularly those with children attending English international preschools, compared their belonging to such groups in relation to other families. This process reflected in how they navigated their choice of international preschool.

Parents who visited numerous international preschools discovered that each had their own particular offer concerning the pedagogical content, the staff that worked there, and the families that attended them. How parents perceived these particularities was rooted in their individual definitions of what was "international" and the combined international and national resources in their family. Parents tended to search for and valorise preschools that reflected their own family. The families' identities of being "international", "non-Swedish", or being from their specific home countries were enacted in their visits to preschools.

They recounted how they felt on their visits. Within their stories, it was apparent that the recognition of themselves in the preschool's social environment played a prominent role in the choices they made for their children. An environment deemed similar to the family guided their beliefs of whether it was the right social environment for their children. In the search for a preschool that

would cater to their family, the emphasis was on representing the combined characteristics of both parents rather than reflecting solely on one parent's traits. This process was clearest amongst those families where one parent was Swedish, and the other was from an English-speaking country. In these parents' search for the right environment for their child, they often attempted to find a preschool where neither cultures nor languages were dominated. Anna, an American mother with a Swedish partner, provides a clear example of this; she described her impressions of several preschools she had visited,

[The preschool we attend] was the place that I thought was best for him, so in some ways, the language definitely played a big piece in it, but more than that I think it was a little bit of the environment and how I truly thought. Now I visited a lot of other schools than just the five I was on [the list for]. I actually went and saw a lot of them, and I saw some other international schools, and I didn't think they were bilingual. I thought they were either strictly English or they said they were English, but it was all communicated in Swedish, like even the tours and everything like that and I, like the little signs on the doors for the kids and everything, you know anything that was up in the schools was Swedish so I, that was one school... and so when I went to [the preschool we now attend], this school had both English and Swedish... signage up inside at the time. I went to one [another international preschool] and I didn't really, it was international, and I wasn't crazy about it though... I feel like they were really English, I didn't feel like there was a tonne of, it didn't feel like there was a lot of, and I guess actually to be honest with you, what I noticed at [the preschool we chose] was that there were a lot of Swedish parents there and they might be Swedes that have lived abroad and I like that rather than diplomats, not that we don't have diplomats.

Although Anna wanted to find a preschool where she felt at home and valued her national background and language, she did not want her child to be in a fully international environment. She discusses her gut feelings about preschools in relation to her family, as a combination of herself, an American mother and her partner, a Swede. Like others in her situation, she also considered their future life plans. Anna and her partner planned to stay in Sweden, meaning her primary concern was ensuring her child wasn't confined solely to international environments, which was a challenge due to her struggles with the Swedish language. Instead, she aimed to cultivate a fusion of their two distinct cultures and languages in her child, endeavouring to preserve identities encompassing American, international, and Swedish aspects. In this context, preschool became a strategic tool for achieving this objective.

Parents evaluated preschools from their own eyes but with the lens of the family and what was best for their children within their current social context and imagined future. This was often done in rather concrete terms by focusing on language and the specific linguistic offers and practices of individual preschools. Parents aimed for an international preschool that reflected the assets of both parents, with the clearest distinction being linguistic. For Anna, it was "bilingual" she desired, reflecting their home life and their child's social context.



Some were rejected for being “strictly English”, and others as everything “was all communicated in Swedish”. Each of these evaluations was made in relation to the complexity of assets in the family.

In addition to the particular linguistic environments that preschools offered, the perceived social recruitment was also influential. Returning to Anna’s citation as an example, she illustrates a viewpoint held by a number of the parents from families with one Swedish and one non-Swedish parent, albeit only those who had been in Sweden a number of years and had decided to settle in the country. She had a positive stance towards preschools with “Swedish parents” rather than “diplomats”, at least not in more significant numbers. For these families, it seemed essential not to portray themselves as wholly belonging to particularly mobile groups, as such an affiliation would contradict the legitimacy of their connection to Sweden. They separated themselves from families who “don’t have the option of Swedish [pre]school, that wouldn’t even consider a true Swedish [preschool]”, unlike themselves who, on a combined family level, possessed national assets that warranted an investment in Swedish arenas.

Although the efforts to authentically navigate the realms perceived as both international and Swedish were predominantly noticeable among families possessing clear attributes tied to these domains, like language proficiency and country of birth, similar processes unfold across a spectrum of families. Even Swedish families in English international preschools can be observed engaging in comparable processes of identification and legitimisation (or right) of belonging. These families knew that international preschools tended to attract non-Swedish speaking families and thus tended to justify their belonging in such an international environment by describing their global experiences. Tove, for example, when asked about her choice-making process, highlighted that an international preschool had not been something that she and her partner had on their radar.

Jenny: Before you started looking around at preschools, had you discussed that language was something that you...

Tove: No, I guess I didn’t have, no, I guess we didn’t at that point...possibly in the back of our head, I’m not sure, but it wasn’t something that, it was more that when we sat and looked around [online] it was “wow look, cool, they have English”, “yes, that could be cool”...

These families conveyed that although they might not have “that background”, meaning they were not so akin to the “international families” they associated with these preschools, they had acquired pertinent social characteristics setting them apart from other Swedish families. They had “lived abroad”, “lived in the USA”, and were “good at the English language”. Additionally, they pointed to their social networks, noting a “very diverse social circle, not just Swedes”, as further evidence of their integration into what is conventionally perceived as an international environment. Consequently, even in the absence of more distinct measures

of international assets, they justified their choices for their children by presenting evidence of their legitimacy in accessing the international environments offered by international preschools.

## Summary of Chapter

This chapter has presented how families traverse constructs of national and international when navigating the preschool landscape. Two main intersecting themes emerged: one related to perceptions of education and care, and the other centred on cultures and language. The differences concerning how families associated and managed ideas of what belongs to national versus international realms have been shown as related to their position on a continuum of emplacement<sup>375</sup> and their distinct constellations of social characteristics. Whilst Chapter Five socially mapped the preschool choices of families, this chapter has explored their descriptions of their choice processes.

Navigating the learning and educational landscape for their children within Sweden's unitary system proved to be a challenge for many non-Swedish parents. This was especially true for those who had recently arrived in the country or were previously socialised into the parenting and ECEC norms of other countries. This encompassed both those who considered fee-charging international preschools and those containing their choices to the publicly funded system. In both cases, parents often felt assured that the quality of education was higher in international preschools, which seemed crucial despite the children's young. Families placed different meanings in international education. Individuals with substantial inherited international assets or hailing from countries offering a specific form of internationality held strong positions in these spaces. Their education could align with that of their home country while simultaneously immersing them in international spheres. On the other hand, those lacking these assets relied on international education as a means of securing their positions within global spheres.

However, there were differences between those with different language profiles. Somali preschools were considered to be not markedly different from other preschools, particularly in terms of pedagogical approaches beyond language. They were fully integrated into the Swedish national education style. In contrast, regarding French preschools, one in particular, affiliated with a fee-charging international school, was perceived as notably distinct from other preschools. Despite adhering to the Swedish curriculum, its educational approach was believed to align more with French and academic values. Although parents did not conceive of it as international, it stood out as distinct from the typical Swedish preschool model.

The influence of the Swedish culture and language on families' choice processes was most apparent amongst those parents navigating the publicly

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<sup>375</sup> Ryan and Mulholland, 'Trading Places', 598.

funded system and opting for English international preschools. These families were typically deciding whether or not to choose internationally profiled preschools, driven in part by the structure of opportunity. Despite no cost constraints limiting their choices, the availability of such preschools was relatively limited.<sup>376</sup> Parents' interactions with Swedes were influential in this decision as these experiences shaped perceptions of whether they were similar to Swedes or belonged to an international group. Particular child-rearing styles and cultural attributes and behaviours, including the use of language, were attributed by non-Swedes to being the norms of the country and were deemed to be reflected in preschools. In cases where these clashed with parents' values and cultures, the preference for internationally orientated preschools was confirmed.

How parents navigated these notions of care and education and culture and language was linked to their social backgrounds. Whilst most of the families generally had similar class backgrounds, their international trajectories provided some distinctions, and it was typically their combination of national and international assets that shaped their views of whether they and their children belonged in international preschools. Moreover, parents' interpretations of what was "Swedish" held different meanings depending on their previous socio-geographic context, which encompassed classed practices in their home countries. For some, the Swedish norm of staying home until parental leave was exhausted was considered too short, while for others, it was deemed too long.

The interviews captured a variation of families, some comprising two non-Swedish parents, others one non-Swedish and one Swedish parent, and a few with two Swedish parents (albeit with some having parents from other countries), each with their distinct individual stories of mobility. Amongst these complexities that could not be captured in Chapter Five, it became apparent that these attributes intersect with their social contexts and their encounters with the preschool landscape. Parents shaped their identities, belongingness, and suitability of preschools in relation to their possibilities and successes of recognition as belonging to national and international spaces. Of particular prominence was the role of language in shaping these processes.

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<sup>376</sup> Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson, *Social Class and Transnational Human Capital*, 68–69.



## Burdens of Linguistic Advantage

The language offerings of international preschools, akin to international schools, are arguably their most distinctive feature. In contrast to their non-international counterparts, these preschools offer typically bilingual social environments, providing children access to linguistic assets that carry symbolic value.<sup>377</sup> Mastery of language, acknowledged as a potential form of power,<sup>378</sup> offers those attending these preschools a potential linguistic social advantage from a young age.

The existing literature concerning international schools often assumes that parents within families share similar linguistic backgrounds. This assumption is either implied in research methodologies,<sup>379</sup> or sidestepped to focus on highlighting categories of mobility within families.<sup>380</sup> Moreover, much of the research is limited to studying English language provision, whether this be in exclusively English institutions or bilingual settings offering English alongside the country's main language. Even if this provides opportunities for studying differences between native English speakers and those investing in the language as additive bilingualism, the linguistic variations within families are shadowed.<sup>381</sup>

This chapter brings the variations of linguistic dynamics amongst families to the fore and contends that the array of foreign languages spoken in international preschools should be considered integral to the study of families' international educational choices. Families' decisions for international education are situated within the broader context of their linguistic practices and children's language development, exploring English-focused preschools and those offering other languages. The chapter shows how the interviewed families, who were presented with the opportunity to bestow linguistic advantages through multilingualism both in the home and through their choice of international preschool, navigate the pivotal stage of their children's early linguistic development. Their child's potential linguistic advantage can become a burden within the framework of good parenting. Transforming this potential into reality requires investments, negotiations, struggles, and adjustments to family dynamics in certain instances.

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<sup>377</sup> Mejía, *Power, Prestige and Bilingualism*, 37.

<sup>378</sup> See Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

<sup>379</sup> E.g. Peter MacKenzie, 'School Choice in an International Context', *Journal of Research in International Education* 9, no. 2 (2010): 107–23; Weenink, 'Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital'.

<sup>380</sup> E.g. Ball and Nikita, 'The Global Middle Class and School Choice'; Adams and Agbenyega, 'Futurescaping'.

<sup>381</sup> E.g. Adams and Agbenyega, 'Futurescaping'.

International preschools emerge as a dual-edged tool in this process, serving as a means to achieve the goal of multilingualism. However, they also hold the potential to become obstacles for families if the linguistic environments at preschool start influencing those within the home.

Taking a broad definition of multilingualism, the chapter captures the spectrum of multilingualism, acknowledging that all the interviewed parents are raising multilingual children. However, whilst all 36 interviews are drawn upon within the chapter, the focus lies predominantly on those managing more than one language in the home, i.e. those with parents speaking different languages. Moreover, in commonality with Chapter Six, interviews are analysed in light of the social positions of families in relation to their locations within the social space of families (see Appendix D).

## Becoming Parents and Multilingual Families

All the interviewed parents were part of what can be broadly termed multilingual families. However, their multilingualism manifested in different forms, depending on their distinctive social contexts. Languages of parents, those offered in preschool, and the local language, Swedish, shaped the variation of multilingualism amongst families. On the one hand, a family's multilingualism could concern only their children. In such families, both parents could be regarded as monolinguals of a shared language; they had grown up surrounded by and using one language.<sup>382</sup> Their children were growing up with two languages, either due to the family's move to Sweden or through Swedish families' choice of international preschool provision for their children. These children were being immersed in more than one language from a young age, growing up bilingual despite their parents' monolingual backgrounds. On the other hand, both parents and children could be multilingual and manage numerous languages. Amongst these families, some comprised parents who had grown up bilingual or had become fluent in foreign languages in their youth. Their children had access to multiple languages, and for those without Swedish-speaking parents, the Swedish language was a further language they were learning through attending international preschools.<sup>383</sup>

The interviewed parents shared their approaches to managing languages within their family unit, all reporting a need to consider the multilingualism of their children. Discernible distinctions emerged between families with parents sharing the same linguistic background and those with different natal languages. These distinctions can be attributed to the point at which multiple languages entered their family dynamics, whether from the moment of their child's birth or when they enrolled in preschool, typically a year or so later. For those who shared the same natal language, the birth of their child had no impact on their family language

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<sup>382</sup> Around twelve of the families can be described as fitting this profile.

<sup>383</sup> Excluding those in fee-charging preschools that were in fully immersed in English.

practices. Multilingualism was not an influential reality of the family until their child began preschool and was immersed in further languages. For the eighteen families that comprised parents who spoke different languages, having children meant a reassessment, and frequently a change, of their family language practices.

These couples had formed their family unit before the birth of their children and had established a family language naturally, typically a single language that they used for communication. The language spoken between the parents-to-be (henceforth termed parents) was either one of the parents' natal tongues that the other could speak (albeit not at a native level), or they met in a third language, typically English. A number of families even comprised parents (either one or both) who had more than one natal tongue or had learnt another language in their childhood that had grown to be a language they placed on par with, or above, their mastery of their natal tongue/s.

The complexities of their language repertoires were of seemingly little issue for these families before having children; they had built their relationships in these languages. However, when becoming parents, individuals expressed the desire to impart their preferred language to their children – a shared aspiration, even in cases where one parent grew up monolingual, and the family language was their native tongue. Parents felt “it’s really important” to pass on their family’s range of languages, even if they had not been a previous part of the family identity as such. The dynamics of their family had evolved, and their children were to be an amalgamation of them both, even if this finally led to family life being “quite hard sometimes with two languages” and discovering their once linguistically straightforward lives had become “very interesting... because we cannot, as of now anyway, have a joint conversation where everyone participates”.

Before the birth of their children, these parents had “talked about what... languages” they would speak, had done “some research”, and made “a choice” regarding their soon-to-be new family language practices, typically the one-language one-parent approach. Parents tended to recount this stage as having few issues; they were optimistic about bringing their other languages into their home, extending their family practices to include the new member of the family unit. However, as babies turned into toddlers and began to develop speech, most of these multilingual families experienced that their young children had developed linguistic imbalances and favoured one language.<sup>384</sup>

Thus, typically unanimously decided and naturally formed language strategies were called into question. Simultaneously, children’s preschool environments were recognised as strategic means for addressing and alleviating language imbalances and contributing factors to such imbalances. In essence, children’s multilingualism was constructed as not solely a family affair but encompassed their children’s institutionalised education.

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<sup>384</sup> A typical pattern of development among young children. See Okita, *Invisible Work*; Piller and Gerber, ‘Family Language Policy between the Bilingual Advantage and the Monolingual Mindset’.

## Experts, Horror Stories, and Personal Experience

The influence that the language environments of international preschools had on children's linguistic development was recognised by all the interviewed parents. It had, after all, been the predominant rationale driving their choices of these institutions. However, the realities of placing their children into bilingual environments, which at times led to unexpected results, could be felt across the spectrum of parents, not just those who were dealing with multiple languages in the home. In all cases, families used experts, horror stories, and personal experiences to manage their children's linguistic development.

For parents who shared a natal language, their child's growing multilingualism concerned the addition of further languages. They felt sure that their shared language, a highly valued family asset, would be transmitted to their child. Typically, there were no concerns about this process; they had, after all, predominantly surrounded their child with this language during the first year of their lives. Even after enrolling at preschool, children would be spending time communicating with their parents in this language. Thus, any further languages added to their children's repertoire were viewed as positive and assumed not possible to dominate the language of the family. This was the case for nearly all the shared language families. However, the few instances that deviated from this pattern illustrate that, while families were secure in passing on their language, a pivotal and dominant asset, the attendance at these preschools altered the dynamics within the family. Family, being the primary tool for social reproduction, saw a shift in strategies – albeit assumedly temporarily – due to the influence of preschool experiences on children at such a young age. These exceptions underscore that the seemingly straightforward path for monolingual families to gain the social advantage of multilingualism through educational choices can have nuanced impacts on family dynamics.

One mother, Tove, in a Swedish-speaking family, explained that her child, who attended a bilingual English-Swedish preschool, “actually started speaking later... than normal, I think”, and it was the English language that came first. Despite her belief in the power of English as a global language, the developmental pattern that emerged, with her child preferring English over Swedish, posed a challenge. English was intended to be an additive language to complement the valuable national asset of Swedish. Her worries led her to discuss this development with her health care practitioner, who was “really supportive”, telling her “don't worry”, the language “will come”, and “it's not a problem”. At the time of the interview, her worries had dissipated. However, this cannot be fully attributed to her trust in the health carer's judgement. Instead, a few years had passed since this pinnacle moment in her child's linguistic journey, and she had now fully developed her home language and spoke English as an extra language.

Another mother, Sofia, from a Spanish-speaking home (Both she and her partner shared Spanish as their native language), had a similar experience, where the shared family language practice was altered by her child's experiences in



preschool. She, too, had sought out the advice of a medical professional when her child had brought English and Swedish into their Spanish-speaking home after her time in an English-international preschool. She relayed the conversation she had with a speech therapist, who had ensured her that she could “respect” the child’s “choice” of language; Sofia could reply in whichever language her child was speaking. This practice was only possible due to Sofia’s own linguistic investments; she could speak English and had also learned Swedish to a high level during the years she had been in the country. Influential in Sofia’s management of these language preferences was not only the words of advice shared by the speech therapist but also the relevance of these languages for their family. They had settled in Sweden, learned Swedish and were not planning on returning to their home country. Whilst their home language was of importance to them, they understood Swedish as being vital for their child’s future in the country and, as avid travellers, English had greater international worth.

Although Tove and Sofia represent just a few cases in amongst the interviews, they serve as nuanced illustrations of the challenges inherent in fostering bilingualism. While the acquisition of such linguistic assets seems uncomplicated in the early years, when children can often effortlessly immerse themselves in foreign languages, a complex interplay emerges between international and national assets and their timing of acquisition. In Tove’s case, her middle-class Swedish background and more limited international exposure shape her perspective. Despite her desire for a symbolic distinction from typical Swedes, through bilingualism, the timing of adding this language resulted in a perceived danger to her more valued Swedish language. Sofia expressed similar worries; however, her greater reliance on international and Swedish assets, such as the English and Swedish languages, somewhat outweighed her need to concentrate on her own language, Spanish, at this stage of her child’s development. Thus, the juxtaposition between symbolic aspirations and the potential challenge of early bilingualism reflects the delicate balance families navigate in evaluating languages, especially when considering their belonging to both national (Swedish and other countries) and global contexts simultaneously.

Moving now to families where parents were speaking different languages to their children, it was apparent that the worries concerning language penetrated deeper into their family dynamics and typically began earlier. Their child’s multilingualism began at birth, and parents’ navigation of parenting multilingually was a process that began even before their child was born. Many of these parents spoke of how they had accessed contemporary “research” regarding raising a multilingual child, which had assured them “that there is no problem for a kid to speak multiple languages”. They had gained knowledge of the recent scientific evidence that informed them that “one person sticks to one language”. The one-language, one-parent approach was well-known amongst these families. Not only had they read these scientific sources, but some had grown up bilingual, themselves having experienced this linguistic approach. Moreover, these families had friends,

acquaintances, and family members who were also parenting multilingual children; their social networks tended to be diverse and not limited to monolingual families.

Expert advice, whether directly obtained or sourced from what were considered reputable online platforms, was evaluated in comparison to insights from their social network, either in the form of personal advice or first-hand observations. The one-language, one-parent approach became typically their chosen method, even if they knew “families that say that they sort of mix it together”, who had success in their children still being able to “differentiate” between languages. This inclination suggests that families often leant on experts for the legitimisation of linguistic practices in their family as raising a child multilingually demanded that they venture into specific realms of parenting they often personally had little experience of. Having embraced a stance on the optimal strategies for raising a multilingual child, parents frequently compared these approaches with those of other families, aiming to position themselves in a value-laden framework of good parenting.<sup>385</sup> For example, Patricia a mother from China compared her “awareness” about raising a multilingual child to her friend in a similar situation who chose another strategy for raising her child in a family with two languages. She explained,

My classmate in my senior high in China, she went to Canada. And she married a Canadian guy, local... but she did not realise this is important. And I think also she wants the family have the harmony or like in a good relationship, I guess, that's why she didn't speak Chinese to her son when he is small... my classmate's son he cannot speak Chinese... it's already too late ... because she did not do too much work when the son was small, then it's already too late

Like other parents in these multilingual families, Patricia held the conviction that there existed not just a moral obligation to transmit both parents' languages but also that the significance of this responsibility should take precedence over maintaining the coherence of the family unit. The family's ease of communication was worth the sacrifice for a bilingual child with mastery of both parent's languages. However, even with confidence in the one-parent, one-language approach, and a commitment to investing time and altering family dynamics, these parents harboured reservations about the success of their endeavours for bilingualism if they experienced the aforementioned imbalances in their children's language acquisition.

These reservations were heightened by the horror stories these parents had heard about other families facing similar linguistic challenges. Narratives gained a degree of credibility in connection to the broader advice on one-parent, one-language, as they encompassed not only language dynamics within the family but also considered the local linguistic and educational context for children. Usually, these parents directed their attention to families akin to their own, those that mirrored similar linguistic structures within their households. Notably, examples

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<sup>385</sup> Piller and Gerber, ‘Family Language Policy between the Bilingual Advantage and the Monolingual Mindset’.

from families where one parent spoke Swedish while the other did not stand out as particularly evident illustrations of the impact of these narratives within the Swedish context. For example, Anna, an English-speaking mother with a Swedish-speaking partner, had heard numerous stories about children growing up in similar English and Swedish-speaking families in Sweden.

I had another friend... she's American, her husband's Swedish, the kids went to a Swedish school and, this is what I thought I'd tell you, I knew several families that this happened to, and the children only spoke Swedish, they didn't speak English even though the mother didn't speak Swedish and only spoke English and then the kids would just speak in front of the mum all the time... and not speak English... and the mum was struggling because she knew a little bit of Swedish but not, one knew none and one knew quite a bit but she would still like struggle with it and they never spoke English to her... both families spoke English at home too, and their kids still spoke Swedish as toddlers to their parents to both the English speaking mums... I've heard these stories about the kids that... speak Swedish and they don't, like they understand English but they don't speak it and then they go back and they are for the first few weeks they are in [their English speaking country], they're just silent, they don't, you know they don't have that relationship, they don't really talk to the parents and it's unfair because Swedes can speak both.

These narratives carry significant weight as they emanate from parents with similar linguistic and social backgrounds, rendering them relatable in a manner that more general information and advice do not achieve. The possibility of facing compromised communication with their children or experiencing a sense of exclusion within the family unit was a genuine concern that these parents felt compelled to address. Essentially, when one parent's language was Swedish, the language of their national context, there existed an elevated perception of the risk that the foreign language could be permanently dominated by Swedish. Despite expert assurances, the tangible experiences of families in similar contexts influenced their perception that firmly embedding themselves in Swedish environments, such as fully Swedish-speaking educational institutions, might heighten this risk. For these families, the one-parent, one-language approach could not be fully trusted as the country's dominant language, along with the potential linguistic environment in preschools and schools, could penetrate the family unit and overpower certain languages. The social positions of these families, as well as the symbolic value of their languages, should be emphasised once more. Their languages were represented by international preschools, a luxury that many other migrant groups do not have access to. Furthermore, due to their middle-class security and recognised international assets, these families had the option of not succumbing to the dominant language, Swedish. However, this option is not viable for many other migrant families who depend on the Swedish language for their social mobility within the country.

Essentially, all the families grappling with the bilingual upbringing of their children were navigating unique language acquisition processes. These processes were intricately linked to the array of languages spoken within their homes and

encountered in Sweden – both in daily life and through educational channels. At pivotal moments in their child’s development, the efficacy of their multilingual practices came under scrutiny. They sought guidance from expert advice, simultaneously drawing from experiences they had either witnessed or heard from other families. Families navigated between expert recommendations and anecdotal stories to validate their linguistic practices. In this journey, expert advice gained significance alongside horror stories and personal experiences, all interpreted in the context of the specificities of their national setting.

## Investing Time at the Right Time

The preceding section demonstrated that the anticipated linguistic advantage that families sought for their children – whether through familial language practices, their chosen preschool, or the amalgamation of both – was not always as straightforward as initially assumed. However, for all the families, it was deemed that the preschool years of children were the most pivotal time to invest in these linguistic assets, whether this involved additional foreign languages or strengthening the home language/s.

Those who opted for a French or Somali-speaking international preschool can all be described as having these languages as home languages, in the sense of being a language used by at least one parent to communicate with their child. However, there is one notable distinction in a family where one parent grew up bilingual. Even though French was not her typical language of communication, Georgia was a native speaker. Among those enrolled in English-speaking international preschools, eighteen can be characterised as having English as a home language, again meaning it is the language used by at least one parent to communicate with their child. However, these rigid classifications are somewhat debatable, as some parents are bilingual in English but choose not to communicate with their children in this language. Nevertheless, the English-speaking international preschools stand out for their distinctive feature, amongst the interviewees, of serving both English-speaking and non-English-speaking families. The Somali language was not a consideration for any of the families except those who were Somali-speaking, indicating its limited general value (as evidenced by their recruitment patterns highlighted in Chapter Five). French held a more universal value among these families, with non-French speakers occasionally expressing a desire for their children to learn it at a later date. English had the broadest appeal among the interviewees; however, French speakers placed less emphasis on this language.

Those who opted for a preschool that offered a home language, whether English, French, or Somali, aimed to advance the language, give their children a “good foundation”, and expose them to a new context where this language was recognised. Both those whose preschools offered instruction in their home language and those whose preschools provided an additional language believed that preschool served as an environment for developing linguistic fluency. This

perception was evident even in the case of the Swedish language, as, except for the two fee-charging preschools, all offered foreign languages in bilingual contexts. For those not sharing a home language with the preschool, achieving pronunciation skills comparable to those of native speakers was considered a possibility most achievable through preschool rather than school.

The language immersion approach of international preschools supported all these hopes and foci for linguistic development; children spent all day naturally surrounded by languages rather than taught them. The comparison of linguistic environments in traditional Swedish schools and international preschools was pertinent amongst those desiring English. They pointed out that English was typically just “a course like in a proper lecture” in schools, leading to limited exposure. Moreover, children would have to “wait three... years” after beginning school to even receive this subject, as despite being an integral part of the curriculum, it is not incorporated into the education of the youngest school-aged children. In an international preschool English was a natural language of communication from day one, meaning that not only did they get a head-start on this language but also received a large amount of exposure. For these families, who saw English as a “prerequisite” for their children, the possibility to “teach... [her] English earlier than later” was influential in their choice for an international preschool, as “it’s not too early really for languages to be figured out... it’s quite proven that they do quite well from the age of one and a half”.

In addition to comparing language provision between schools and preschools, the rationale for prioritising language development at the preschool level, as opposed to later in school, was justified by the absence of academic focus at preschool. Preschool was seen as a time when language could be in focus, as preschool was “not really the same thing” as school. There were no competing avenues of advantage in preschools as “there are no grades... and those sorts of things”. Moreover, for those who were less reliant on their children following international educational paths due to Swedish being a home language, preschool was deemed a more appropriate time for international education. They had their sights on potential “Swedish” schools with good reputations among the Swedish middle class in their area, and their priorities lay in choosing those with the best grades. As a result, preschool became a secure stage for investing in international education before eventually turning to their more familiar routes of advantage within well-regarded “Swedish” schools.

For many of the families, preschool was provision for their children at a time when they were unsure about their futures in the country. Consequently, their choice of preschool was considered in light of the potential educational paths their children might undertake. Even those who claimed they were planning on staying in the country or had overstayed their plans of leaving by more than ten years frequently mentioned that a cross-border move was never out of the question. Choosing a preschool for their children seemed to be an occasion where family discussion about mobility became more focused, perhaps due to both national and international pathways becoming more tangible through the

possibilities provided by international preschools. Preschool was a time for children to gain the linguistic skills needed for later educational success, which meant assessing “the direction” their families were heading.

A comparison of Pablo and Uri illustrates how families use preschools as a social environment to provide their children with languages for their planned futures. Both had children in bilingual English international preschools, although neither had English as a language of communication in their homes. Pablo explained that his choice was due to the need for his child to learn English. They were not sure if they were “going to stay here”, so “thought that half English as a background was going to be more, you, know, useful than the Swedish”, he said, swiftly apologising for his demotion of the Swedish language. His interview suggests more of a lack of interest in the Swedish language than of a belief or value in English. For Uri, whose child attended a preschool with a similar profile, Swedish was crucial. He and his partner planned to make Sweden their home and wanted their child to “fully integrate into this society, so to learn Swedish first of all”. He acknowledged that “English, too, would be great” for his child. However, it was the “atmosphere” of the bilingual preschool that he said drove their choice. “There are other kids learning Swedish who are not native” in the preschool, meaning that Uri could, in the process of integrating his child, avoid them being in a situation where “most of the kids are Swedish”. Uri used the international preschool to set his child on what he saw as a successful route to later enter more nationally focused schools without hindrances.

Essentially, families attempted to use international preschools to gain linguistic skills and experiences to succeed in schools, whether this be in international or non-internationally orientated schools. The development of language skills before entering formal education not only played a significant role in shaping their school options but was also perceived as a secure period to invest in language acquisition before the academic rigours of school learning began. The immersive language structure in international preschools, coupled with the belief in young children as linguistic “sponges”, facilitated this approach. It was evident that families navigating the preschool landscape engaged in assessing their children’s linguistic situations and possibilities, all while considering future educational pathways.

### A Stepping-stone in School Pathways

Preschool was rarely an isolated educational choice. Parents generally explained that their choice of preschool was related to the planned educational trajectories of their children, at least as far as primary school. Both possible moves to other countries and plans for international and national educational trajectories within Sweden have been shown to be justifications for parents’ choice of international preschool. In addition, preschool choice was, in a handful of cases, a route to specific international schools. In these cases, families enrolled their children in preschools affiliated with specific primary schools, as this improved their chances of admission to the school.

Amongst the interviewed parents, there were two preschools that were affiliated with schools in this way.<sup>386</sup> One is attached to a publicly funded school with an international orientation offering English and Chinese languages in addition to its primary language, Swedish.<sup>387</sup> The other is a French private international school that charges fees and follows the French curriculum. These schools prioritise children who have attended their affiliated preschools when distributing places, a practice that influenced families' choices of preschool. The social recruitment dynamics of these preschools can be assumed to mirror those of schools. In connection with the social space discussed in Chapter Five, it can be inferred that these preschools and schools cater more to resource-strong families characterised by high levels of economic and educational capital (see Appendix B).<sup>388</sup> This understanding shed light on the significance these schools hold for families. They are not only discussed as renowned in interviews, but their recruitment practices make them a secure choice for middle-class families.

Those parents whose children attended the international preschool affiliated with the predominantly Swedish-speaking international school suggested that the preschool was less important; they had other options that would have suited their children equally well. It was the school that was the goal, a school said to be renowned for its quality of education and children's high achievement. One mother explained that "once we learned that you can only get into the school if you're in the preschool, then I was like, oh, we have to go to that preschool". Another said that they had "also heard that if you don't get a place in preschool, you can't get into the school, it's too late". With access to the school tied to attending the preschool, choosing the preschool to "secure a place", was crucial. Given the extended waiting lists, families often had to place their children in alternative settings temporarily, only moving them to the desired preschool once a spot became available.

A similar practice was found among those aspiring to enrol their children in the French private school. However, not only the system for allocation of places influenced parents to opt for their affiliated preschools. The French language test for securing admission was a worry for those who deemed that their children's French may not be as developed as those children growing up in a fully French-speaking home. These families saw a necessity for their children to have "French as much as possible". Whilst other French-speaking international preschools may have sufficed, as one parent pointed out, their child needed "to attend the preschool to manage" both the expectations on French fluency and the relatively early academic expectations characteristic of the school's provision. This perspective highlights the significance of international education at the preschool level, especially for families

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<sup>386</sup> Two further preschools could be included here, but none of the interviewed parents attending them had any concerns about accessing their schools.

<sup>387</sup> The school has since altered its orientation and demoted its international profile and foreign language offer.

<sup>388</sup> The preschools discussed are the largest circle in the figures (the English-speaking) and the largest diamond (the French-speaking).

facing more complex linguistic situations. Preschool serves as a tool to address a perceived lack of linguistic skills in comparison to children whose parents share the same language. It becomes a proactive measure to equip children with the necessary linguistic mastery to access the educational paths parents desire.

Thus, both routes to specific schools and more loosely planned school trajectories were intrinsic to how families navigated preschool options for their children. A commonality between families was a belief that preschool was a suitable time and educational level for their children to develop the linguistic foundations they needed for their pathways to school. Assessing languages and specific preschools according to their ability to provide children with the linguistic skills they needed meant, for some, enrolling their children in preschools outside of their area of residence. They were willing to sacrifice their time by commuting to preschools where they could invest in specific linguistic and social environments for their children.

### Worth a Commute

A perceived need for investing in specific languages in children's early years meant, for some, substantial. Whether families commuted was dependent on the geographic distribution of preschools, where they lived, and the parenting cultures they had formed regarding the moral obligation to pass on languages or invest in international assets. Ideally, the interviewed families wanted their children to attend a preschool close to home, the neighbourhood preschool. They were, after all, parents to young children and needed to manage the demands of family life. The prospect of travelling longer distances to preschool, alongside their commutes to work or other time constraints and schedules, was something they wanted to avoid. However, the offer of preschools in their area, as well as what was at stake for families regarding whether to opt for an international preschool environment for their children, was influential in how willing they were to travel further afield.

Amongst the interviewees, there was a wide variation in the distances that families lived from their preschools, ranging from "just one road away" to travelling around ten kilometres. Their own specific social situations and commuting practices can be better understood in light of the wider patterns of the entire population of families in the Stockholm municipality.<sup>389</sup> Table 4 presents the shares of families attending international and non-international preschools that attend their closest preschool, their second to eighth closest preschools, and

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<sup>389</sup> For this geographical analysis, the population studied is confined solely to the municipality of Stockholm. This decision is made to ensure a focused comparison among families residing in urban centers, rather than including those from less metropolitan areas. Several bordering municipalities, although part of the broader study, present distinct geographical features with sparser populations. Including them could potentially bias the commuting results.



preschools further away.<sup>390</sup> The table provides the mean distances travelled for each group and is broken down by whether they have either a Swedish or foreign background.<sup>391</sup> Those who do not commute are those attending their closest preschool, which is also illustrated by the shorter average distances between their residences and their preschools. Those attending their second to eighth closest preschools travel further to their preschools but not great distances, perhaps indicating their desire to avoid their neighbourhood preschools.<sup>392</sup> The final group, those attending preschools further away than their closest eight, can be seen as large investors in their preschool choice, and perhaps an indication of their perception of their not existing suitable options in their area.

Table 4. Nth preschool attended, non-international and international preschools, total, and Swedish and foreign background.

Non-international preschool	1nth n=6 351	Mean distance in meters (SD)	2-8nth n=10 841	Mean distance in meters (SD)	9nth + n=10 566	Mean distance in meters (SD)
Total	22.9%	140 (199)	39.1%	419 (295)	38.1%	2,325 (2,393)
Swedish backg.	21.6%	145 (176)	40.2%	423 (231)	38.2%	2,301 (1,312)
Foreign backg.	24.4%	134 (222)	37.8%	414 (361)	37.9%	2,512 (2,487)
International preschool	1nth n=238	Mean distance in meters (SD)	2-8nth n=420	Mean distance in meters (SD)	9nth + n=1 178	Mean distance in meters (SD)
Total	13.0%	119 (144)	22.9%	430 (66)	64.2%	2,946 (2,580)
Swedish backg.	16.3%	121 (129)	24.7%	488 (735)	59.0%	2,449 (2,513)
Foreign backg.	11.7%	117 (151)	22.2%	404 (471)	66.2%	3,119 (2,583)

In this wider population, it is apparent that families attending international preschools tend to more often be enrolled in preschools that are not their closest, in comparison to those in preschools without an international orientation. Moreover, those with foreign backgrounds in international preschools tend to attend international preschools further away from their residence compared to those with Swedish backgrounds.

Among the interviewed parents, those who valued international environments or particular languages over solely Swedish environments were willing to travel further afield if their local area had no suitable options. Their living situations were also influential; if they already had a child before moving to Stockholm or had the possibility to relocate within the city, they “could scope out the preschool situation” and later school options, which influenced their choice of neighbourhood. Others were more tied to certain areas due to having already purchased a property, possessing a first-hand rental contract, their location of employment, or related to their economic resources and their need for larger properties often

<sup>390</sup> The coordinates of each preschool and home are given as the bottom left corner of a 250 square meter area within which they are located. Thus, the closest preschool represents any preschool in the surrounding squares from this point. The coordinates for the international preschools are more precise as the exact coordinates are used.

<sup>391</sup> Swedish background families are those with children born in Sweden who have two Swedish-born parents with Swedish-born parents. Opting for this particular categorisation of Swedish background has been done so in attempt to capture possible foreign languages spoken in the family.

<sup>392</sup> Fjellborg and Forsberg, ‘Commuting Patterns of Preschool Children in Metropolitan Stockholm’.

located outside of the city centre. Depending on the distribution of preschools, being limited in these ways could demand larger commuting investments if they wanted their children to attend particular preschools.

Embedded within the general commuting patterns of international and non-international preschools are differences relating to their particular language offerings. Table 5 provides a detailed breakdown of commuting distances to international preschools based on language.<sup>393</sup> It outlines the percentage of families attending their nearest preschool, the 2nd to 8th closest options, or those opting for a more distant preschool. Additionally, the table presents average distances. Certain preschools, like the German and French ones, are linked to families facing longer commuting distances, as their attendees often reside at a considerable distance. In contrast, preschools such as those offering Somali tend to attract families from closer proximity.

Table 5. Nth preschool attended to international preschool by language profile.

Language	1 <sup>st</sup> (n)	Mean distance in meters (SD)	2-8 <sup>th</sup> (n)	Mean distance in meters (SD)	9 <sup>th</sup> + (n)	Mean distance in meters (SD)
English	9.8 % (116)	117 (154)	21.1% (249)	465 (722)	69.2% (818)	2,909 (2,591)
English (weak)	27.1 % (78)	147 (132)	29.5% (85)	438 (174)	43.4 % (125)	2,532 (2,368)
French	4.4 % (7)	142 (133)	13.7% (22)	381 (129)	82.0% (132)	3,787 (2,563)
German	7.7% (3)	83 (143)	7.7% (3)	284 (59)	84.6% (33)	4,397 (2,714)
Greek	14.3% (3)	83 (144)	19.1% (4)	327 (51)	66.7% (14)	2,250 (1,894)
Somali	21.1% (24)	70 (128)	42.1% (48)	308 (107)	36.8% (42)	1,300 (1,579)

The results presented in Table 5 provide some interesting insights that point to both the geographic distribution of preschools and the investments families are willing to make regarding commuting to access specific linguistic environments for their children. Among the families with children enrolled in international preschools, the English preschools that only offer an introduction to the language, along with the Somali preschools, are attended, to a greater degree than the other language-profiled preschools, by families living close by. None of the interviewees' children attended preschools with this weaker English profile, but it can be deduced that these preschools lacking distinct linguistic environments, are perceived as less suitable for families seeking bilingual education. On the contrary, they may be considered suitable for those in search of more typical preschools, and thus, those living in the area may make them their localised choice.

The same cannot be said for the Somali preschools. They do have distinct provision and can, therefore, be assumed to be attended by families searching for the specific language environment they offer. This is backed up by the interviews with staff members and parents at these preschools. The localised recruitment of these preschools can be attributed to both the symbolic value attached to the language and the geographic distribution of the preschools themselves. These in-

<sup>393</sup> The Estonian preschool is not included here as too few of the children had geographic information available.

stitutions are strategically located in areas where a significant number of Somali families reside, contributing to a more localised enrolment. In the social space analysis of Chapter Five, these preschools were found to be characterised by families with little economic and educational capital, which shows that these preschools and the Somali language hold little symbolic worth in the class structures of Sweden and arguably in international arenas. Unlike the English preschools, which attract a wide demographic of non-English-speaking families, these Somali preschools have worth for a specific group who happen to live in the geographic area.

The German and French preschools are those with the largest commutes. 82 percent of those in French preschools and 85 percent of those in German preschools attended a preschool further away than their closest eight, which demanded longer commutes. Interviews with parents at French preschools indicate that the patterns of commuting are a result of the combination of the location of these preschools and what is at stake for the families that choose them. Contributing strongly to the commuting patterns of French preschools is one specific institution, the aforementioned French bilingual preschool that is affiliated with the French international school. The preschool and school are located on one of Stockholm's smaller, less-densely populated inner-city islands. None of the few interviewed families that attended this preschool lived in this area. However, they all were committed to the commute, perceiving it as worth the educational opportunities their children would receive. One parent described how the preschool was not in "the same area" that they lived, but it was still "quite near", taking only a "twenty-minute cycle", which, whilst perceived as relatively short, is still a substantial commute in this metropolitan context. Another takes public transport across several city areas, and whilst the train was "direct", it was "still a bit of a distance", the journey being a "bit tricky". A third parent managed the commute by car, taking "25 minutes" or at rush hour "a half hour up to an hour".

Those carrying out more substantial commutes rationalised them as part of their parental responsibility to provide the best opportunities for their children. Once they recognised the linguistic advantages that these preschools could offer, attending them despite the long commute became a moral obligation for these parents. This underscores the complex interplay between the marketisation processes of preschools and the moral considerations of parents,<sup>394</sup> which come to the fore when inspecting a specific aspect of the market. This intersection between marketisation and parental morality is particularly pronounced when considering the symbolic value attributed to children's multilingualism. A typical way in which these parents justified commutes (either factual or their potential willingness) was to compare those they deemed typical to other countries to those of Sweden. In essence, they recognised that long commutes were not common practice for Swedish parents and, therefore, aligned themselves with what they presented as good parenting cultures in other national contexts. A dialogue between Fahad and Gabriela illustrates this,

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<sup>394</sup> Karlsson, Löfdahl, and Prieto, 'Morality in Parents' Stories of Preschool Choice'.

Fahad: the majority of people we met in Sweden just go for the one next to the corner. They just want to go to the closest one, they don't do that much research... That's also the case for school, which surprised me, but looks like they cannot be bothered to go ten extra minutes by bus to get to a better school

Gabriela: or they pick their house on that basis, I don't know.

Fahad: I think that stems from the feeling of equality that is here in Sweden, that everything is good, everything is of good quality and well, whether you go to the one next to the corner [or ten minutes on the bus], it's the same teaching quality. I don't know; that's how I felt, at least.

Gabriela: but I think in [previous country of residency], it seems like it is very different, people are really trying to scramble to get into the, you know, top and pay a lot of money to get into or to pay to go to the top preschools because they're feeder schools into primary schools. And there, it seems like there's a lot more competition.

Fahad and Gabriela's child attended a preschool that was not in their neighbourhood. However, their commute was relatively short as they resided in the city centre, meaning the distance to the city area where their preschool was located was fairly short. However, they had explored options further away and presented this as a symbol of their good parenting in comparison to Swedes who "cannot be bothered". They could not fully trust that all educational institutions provided the same quality care, like they claimed Swedes did, especially for their family who had distinct linguistic needs. Their willingness to search further afield helped form their belief that they had opted for the best for their child. The interview with Naomie serves as another example of this phenomenon,

we have to take the tram one stop and the subway three stops and then walk ten minutes, so it takes us about thirty-five minutes in transportation. So, it's a bit long, you know, when you do that during the day back and forth and go to work. And now the oldest one is at school, so to do all that it takes about almost two hours a day to drop off to pick up. So, but that's I mean, for us, it was never a priority to just be close, I know here. I noticed after that people tend to choose whatever is the closest from home. But for us it was never an issue. I mean, we're used to commuting for a long time in [European city] so it's like not a problem. So for us the priority was to find a place that was important and that was like good for the kids. So, we didn't care where it was. We would have committed more if needed, so it's stressful and it takes time. But it's, the stress is on us, not on them. So, it doesn't matter. So, we yeah. We don't mind

After Naomie made her choice of preschool, she formed her understanding of what typical parenting behaviours regarding preschool commutes were. She had been unaware of these during her process of exploring preschool options, instead simply following her previously formed notion that commuting is part of everyday life. She and her family lived outside of the inner-city area and explored preschool options across the city, unphased by longer commutes.

Once enrolled in their international preschool, parents encountered others like them who also commuted. This solidified their conviction regarding the importance of dedicating time and effort to secure the appropriate educational institution during the early years of their children's education. Moreover, the willingness to commute was seen as a symbol of the quality of the preschool. Sofia explained that "there's some other parents that comes from other parts of Stockholm...because they choose this [pre]school". She lived close to the preschool as their move to the city had been negotiated in relation to preschool and school options. However, choosing preschool that was "really close" had never been a priority; instead "the right [pre]school" was of greater importance. Realising that some parents "come from really far away" for "the profile" "was a good sign". Felicity also pointed out that "people from really much further" away than her commuted to her preschool, which assured her that her "30 minutes on public transportation, or maybe 20 on a bike" was worth the investment. Simultaneously, her logic can be understood as downplaying her commute, placing her own practices as more similar to the norm in comparison.

## Dealing with the Mother's Tongue

The preceding sections of this chapter have delved into how families' specific social contexts, encompassing both the languages spoken within the family and those prevalent in educational institutions, significantly influenced their choices of preschools for their children. Throughout, the chapter has explored distinctions that arise when parents do not share the same native language. To gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics unique to this demographic, this section is dedicated to elucidating the impact of linguistic and gendered structures within families and their implications on preschool choice. It underscores the integral role gendered dynamics play in how parents navigate preschool choices and negotiate them within the family.

In its modern usage, the term mother tongue tends to be a synonym to terms such as first language and language 1, which all suggest a hierarchy of languages. Moreover, with the historical division of childcare being in the hands of mothers, the term can be seen to perpetuate ideas of a child having a main language, which is that spoken by their mother. However, in families where parents speak different languages to their children, the aim seems to be to avoid a preferred language or a singular mother tongue, hence the promotion of the contemporary one-language, one-parent approach. Amongst the interviewed families in this situation, a problem existed concerning this goal; many viewed the mother's tongue as their child's mother tongue, with this language "taking over".

The age of their children at the time of the interview is relevant for understanding how families dealt with the perceived danger of the mother's tongue. Before starting preschool, it had typically not been much of a concern for parents as children were not "speaking any language". However, with children

often beginning preschool around the time their speech starts to develop, this juncture became a significant moment of realisation for several families. Those with older children reflected back on this stage, evidencing that even though they had progressed through this issue in the family, it had been an issue at one point in their family. Felicity, for instance, shared that her partner “always thought [their child’s] English was better”, which she backed up by explaining that her child’s “English was more prominent” but was “definitely 50–50” now.

There were just a few families in which children’s strongest language was that only spoken by fathers. Such a preference was either attributed to the language in the preschool they attended or the language of communication between parents being that of the father. These justifications, when forwarded by mothers, implied an underlying, and even at times explicit, guilt that their language was being dominated by the father’s. This highlights a viewpoint that if any language were to take precedence, it should ideally be the mother’s, aligning with societal expectations of what constitutes good motherhood. Belinda, for example, had “always spoken Swedish” with her partner, as she had moved independently to the country as a young adult and learnt the language before they met. She explained that it felt unusual when she had her child to “suddenly speak English at home” despite it being her natal language. She had been more “consistent” with her use of English in the early stages of motherhood but had slipped into using more Swedish as time went on. They had chosen an English international preschool, which she did not associate as a strategy to support her child’s English acquisition, but what they believed would be an English-speaking environment for their child was said not to be. Instead, “quite a lot of the children don’t have English at home or another language in the home”, as many of the families were completely Swedish-speaking, meaning “most of their friends are completely Swedish”. Although she acknowledged her own part in her child’s preference for Swedish over English, she also placed responsibility on the preschool, explaining “that there are so many children that don’t have English at home has affected us”, “we have experienced that... English has always taken... second place”.

The development of what was seen as the dominance of the mother’s tongue was a point of struggle within the family. While mothers shared insights into this issue, the perspectives of fathers in multilingual families interviewed shed light on their feelings and strategies in managing this challenge within their households. Additionally, their viewpoints on how preschool either exacerbated the problem or served as a potential solution were explored. The interview with Fahad and Gabriela serves as an illustrative example, highlighting how challenges intensify when two symbolically valued languages coexist within a family. Fahad explained,

[I] didn’t foresee the problem of her not speaking French arising before she was born. For me, it was to be a given because I will speak French to her all the time. That’s who will speak French. I didn’t expect that English will be so strong compared to her French, but I think it stems from the fact that indeed I speak English to my wife and... it is the language that my wife speaks to her... which

overwhelms the French I speak to her... for me, like the French was essential because I don't feel like being, how to phrase that, I feel like it's artificial when I speak English to my child, it doesn't feel like it's, yes, I can communicate, You see, I talk to my wife in English, but still there is something that is missing. If I don't speak to French to my daughter, this feels less natural. It doesn't feel like a father-daughter but it's just like artificial because English is also the language I use at work, while French is the language I use with my parents, with my sister, so I don't know. So, it feels like important that I was able to speak French to her.

In Fahad and Gabriela's family, Fahad speaks French to their child and Gabriela in English. When conversing with one another, they use English, and it was this language that their child was deemed to have become their strongest, a development that worried Fahad, but also Gabriela. They explained that they had always planned for their child to attend a French rather than an English-speaking international preschool, which can be mostly attributed to how they viewed the languages. Both languages were recognised for their symbolic worth in the family and as global languages and thus were given equal importance.

They had not initially received a place at the bilingual French preschool their child now attended. Instead, they enrolled at a non-international preschool that was fully Swedish-speaking. During this time, their child's English continued to advance at a faster rate than French. An accentuating factor in this was their child's friendship with another English speaker in the preschool, which Fahad emphasised as problematic. Both Fahad and Gabriela expressed the view that it was "quite important" for their child to learn Swedish. However, their primary emphasis remained on the languages spoken within the family. Despite acknowledging the potential advantages Swedish might offer in the country, they downplayed its significance in comparison to the two symbolically valued languages present within their household. Placing their child in a Swedish-speaking environment had been detrimental to their family project, Fahad did not express the benefit of their child making an English-speaking friend but rather saw this as endangering the position of his language in their family.

Jenny: And did you, did you say that her best friend, at the previous [Swedish speaking] school was an English speaker?

Gabriela: He spoke both languages. He had one parent that was Swedish, one parent that was American And so.

Fahad: they were essentially conversing with each other in English, sometimes for a few minutes in Swedish, but essentially in English.

Gabriela: Yeah. Yeah. But she could speak [Swedish], like she was two years every day in a Swedish [preschool], she spoke to the other children and the teachers in Swedish. I think we're forgetting that, that it's only now, honey, that we've switched it to French. But it was before the opposite. She was much more comfortable in Swedish.

Fahad: Yeah, but she's always been much more fluent in English.

Gabriela: Yes, but English is always stronger than both.

Fahad: I'm just wondering whether she didn't choose this best friend to be her best friend and the other way around as well because of the language, because they were the only English speakers.

Gabriela: Yes. But then when they would play, they would switch languages amongst themselves. they would be speaking English and Swedish, like when they, when they would come over.

Fahad: they would like speak three hours of English and five minutes of Swedish, let's be honest

Gabriela: Ok. So, yeah all right. It was more English than Swedish. But I'm saying they would flip of their own accord, is what I'm saying, just by themselves.

Fahad's original belief that the French language would be a given as he would be using it as the language of communication with his child dissipated as social environments outside the home accentuated the already apparent language imbalances within the home. In later switching to a bilingual French international preschool, they could strengthen his dominated language by giving their child a social environment without English.

The perceived significance of the linguistic environments to which children were exposed emerged as a prominent theme in the interviews with these families. Specifically, these families recognised the potential to leverage the language offerings within the preschool market as a means to influence their efforts in passing on their languages to their children. In essence, it became evident that the ongoing discourse surrounding the development of their children's languages, especially regarding the dominance of the mother's tongue, remained a "continuous topic". This persistence was further heightened due to the opportunities and constraints presented by the educational market, shaping the experiences of these families raising multilingual children.

It is crucial to emphasise that the limited representation of languages in international preschools, featuring only a handful of the world's languages, highlights the unique circumstances of these families. These families wielded the potential to address linguistic imbalances within the home through their choices in the preschool market. Beyond this, their secure social backgrounds, including the symbolic worth of their languages on a global scale, empowered them to access institutions that not only provided the linguistic environments they sought but also ensured, especially if they stayed within their city area, that their children's peers would be socially similar middle-class individuals. In essence, this allowed them to secure a preschool with a predominantly middle-class enrolment.



Simultaneously, they had the unique opportunity to endeavour to counteract the dominance of the mother's tongue within their family dynamics.

### The Efforts of Mothering

In the cases where the mother's tongue was deemed to "take over", internal struggles in the family took place, even if both parents were anxious about this development. As shown in the previous section, when the mother's language was also used as the language of communication between parents, this linguistic structure was attributed to the child's preference towards that language, as it dominated the family unit. However, the mothers frequently justified the linguistic imbalance as a result of their parenting; they had put in more effort and time. They had spent more time with their children, having typically taken more parental leave than fathers. Moreover, they pointed out that not only the time they spent with their children was influential in their children's language development, but also that their more intensive parenting styles, or mothering, differed from their partners. The comparison between two parents, Naomie and Anna, provides insightful examples of how these mothers reflect on their roles in their children's language development. They illuminate intricacies in navigating the challenges experienced and justified when the linguistic dynamics within the family differ. This includes considerations of their chosen preschool's significance and how these aspects intersect with the commonly perceived differences in parenting between mothers and fathers.

In Naomie's family, the language spoken between her and her Swedish-speaking partner is English. He uses Swedish to communicate with their children, and she uses French, her native language. She explained that her children "speak only French to each other" and that her preschool-aged child "only expresses emotions in French", which she places as an indication of strength in language. The linguistic constellation within the family, where neither parent's native language is used for communication between them, creates a situation where both languages have an equal opportunity for transmission; there is no inherent imbalance in how they organise their languages as a family unit. Despite attending a bilingual English-Swedish preschool, the Swedish language seems generally less present in comparison to the other two languages, and the French language dominates, despite it being a language they receive at home.

Naomie: I'm more present in the kids' life than my husband, I mean, we live together, but he works more, he is very much addicted to his phone. So, he doesn't speak as much to them as I do. I'm the one reading the stories. I'm the one like, you know, asking how the school day went and so on. So they have a lot more interaction in French at home than they do in Swedish, which is maybe why French is maintained for them. I think the second they pass the door, it's French, in their mind... I think it's because I'm more present language-wise than my husband is...

Jenny: Is that something that you and your partner discuss, like the need to work on one language or improve another?

Naomie: No, not really. I mean, it's. Well, I'm personally very proud that they speak French [laughs] mainly because, I mean, they only get it from me, right? They have no like French-speaking friends, they don't have French-speaking school. So, they only get it from me. I'm actually surprised that they speak so much French, I have to say, and that they speak French to each other. I think this is my biggest pride as a mother, honestly, because it's how come that they're both born here from a Swedish father, and they still choose to interact only in French? It's just I find it really, really strong. So, I'm really happy with that. But they're not bad in Swedish, I mean, they speak Swedish fine. They probably speak less Swedish than a Swedish child with both Swedish parents, but they still speak enough to be at school without any problem, and preschool without any problem.

Naomie's children did not attend a French-speaking preschool but rather a bilingual Swedish and English, meaning that her children's abilities in French were deemed her achievement alone, proof of her successful parenting. This is highlighted by the way she resonates regarding the effort she puts into language and time invested in daily parenting activities. She had little emphasis on the Swedish language, placing it on the shoulders of her Swedish partner and designating it to be his responsibility. As Naomie took part in the interview without her partner, his perceptions of their children's linguistic skills were missing; however, she did mention that when her child speaks French to her partner, he replies "can you speak Swedish to me?", indicating a desire for them to develop this language. However, from Naomie's perspective, there is little discussion about the importance of the Swedish language for their family.

An attributing factor to this can be the family's future plans for mobility and their original plan when they moved to Sweden. At the time of the interview, Naomie and her partner had lived in Sweden for a good number of years, although this had not been the original plan, and they still actively searched for jobs abroad. For their possible move, French and English were suggested by Naomie to be important languages to both the parents as "pretty much everywhere you find at least an English and French school", meaning the children's education would not be compromised. On the other hand, Swedish was of little significance to Naomie, especially as she had not been "particularly excited to move back to Sweden" and thought they would "just do it for two years". Her reluctance to establish deeper roots in Sweden was reflected in her decision to delegate the task of ensuring her children mastered Swedish to her partner. Naomie saw no danger in French becoming less prominent in her children's lives, even if they continued their English language education. "I think the Swedish would be the one that, not disappeared, would diminish the most". When asked if that would be a problem for her and her partner she replied, "not for me, but I guess, I hope that for him it would be a problem, that he would react to it, but it wouldn't matter to me".

Naomie seemed unbothered about her children's Swedish mastery; it was the responsibility of her partner, and she had not opted for a preschool that furthered

her language. Instead, their children had English and Swedish in their preschool environment, meaning that their French preference was the result of her effort as a mother alone. She felt no responsibility for developing her children's Swedish as she was not planning their futures in the country. On the other hand, Anna, an English speaker with a Swedish-speaking partner, had a different perspective on her child's preference for her language. Anna exhibited anxiety and guilt about her young child's preference for her language, accentuated by the "pressure" she was experiencing from inside the family. Talking about her children's language skills she explained that "it's mostly English, it's all English... predominately English". Her worries about the domination of English were transformed into guilt for two reasons.

Firstly, she had made an "argument" for choosing an English international preschool rather than those without international profiles. Her navigation and choices in the preschool market made her accountable for the situation her family faced. Despite choosing a preschool she believed mirrored the bilingual context of her home, she suggested that opting for an international setting may have exacerbated their challenges. Secondly, despite residing in Sweden, she hadn't mastered the language to a significant extent. This resulted in English being the language of communication between her and her partner, creating an inherent imbalance in the usage of English and Swedish within the household. This linguistic structure extended into daily interactions outside the home. However, she simultaneously also justified her child's language preference as the result of her efforts in comparison to her partner's. When asked about their language practices and whether her partner speaks Swedish to her child, Anna replied,

I don't think he's great about it, like, he's not really diligent, he tries because now he's panicked because she's not speaking it, but because he speaks English to me and sometimes it's just the flow of what's coming out of his mouth, I mean he'll end up saying stuff in English, so we've been working really hard to and actually [child's paternal grandparent] does the same thing, which is really funny and I'm like "*prata svenska, prata svenska* [speak Swedish, Speak Swedish]" but I know, it's a concern because I notice people speak English to me, all my friends and then they end up speaking to [my child] in English too, so I'm constantly having to say "*prata svenska*" but the fault then really is mine, because if I was speaking Swedish more regularly with the other adults around then it would be, but because they and maybe they're trying to be polite, like not saying something that they think I don't understand but I'm like "no no it's fine"... I understand most of it.

Her excerpt shows a reaction to the language practices in their home. She referenced the notion that "I should only speak English and he should only speak Swedish" but at this moment in their child's development, this strategy, "the idea we had all along", had seemed to fail in meeting their linguistic goals. Passing on two natal languages was not the burden-free activity that they had expected. For both Anna and seemingly her partner, the mother's tongue became problematic in their family project; their shared goal was losing its solidarity. Rather than being proud of her accomplishments, such as Naomie was, Anna felt "guilty, I constantly feel guilty and

constantly try to make up for it". Whilst she did express that "I think we're just being nervous and hard on it" and "maybe it'll all catch up and be fine" these comments were more fleeting statements within a wide range of utterances regarding the worries and guilt she felt along with the thought of "maybe I've failed".

Anna's original linguistic worry had been that the amount of Swedish surrounding her child in Sweden would dominate the English, which was even justified by the pragmatic need for English as their original plans included a probable move to an English-speaking country. She may have led this choice of international preschool, but together as a family, it had been deemed fundamental to achieving their mutual parenting plan of raising a bilingual child. However, in light of the experienced weakness of the Swedish language being spoken by their child, Anna turned her attention to the role of preschool in this. It should be noted that the preschool itself has a language profile that mirrors that of Anna's family: English and Swedish. However, Anna suggested that the staffing of the preschool, which she explained had a period in which it lacked a consistent Swedish teacher, may have contributed to the predominance of English. At one time, "everyone was native English and that [the staff] have been told that when you're speaking to the children, you should speak in your native language, so a lot of teachers were always speaking English".

Thus, whilst their preschool choice was a tool for their bilingual goals, they deemed, on a certain level, that it had hindered these by strengthening the English language. Anna's salient role in making this first education choice contributes to her feelings of "guilt" despite simultaneously acknowledging her efforts in passing on her language. She mentioned, "I read to him in Swedish and I try to do little things... if [my child] says something in English... I repeat a short sentence in Swedish", going against their previous language practices, she justifies as needed as her partner "is travelling now a lot and he's not necessarily around". In essence, Anna takes on some responsibility of passing on her partner's language and fighting her child's preference and strength in her mother's tongue.

In commonality with Naomie, Anna placed the predominant responsibility of teaching her child Swedish in the hands of her Swedish partner. However, as her desire was to stay in Sweden and lay the foundation for their future in the country, her child's proficiency in the Swedish language became increasingly significant. Thus, the comparison of these two parents highlights how, even amongst socially similar families (see Figure 19 in Appendix D),<sup>395</sup> the symbolic value of languages can diverge depending on the futures they imagine for their children. With intentions to remain in Sweden, Anna could not afford for her child not to master the Swedish language. She seemed to recognise the necessity of the national language, even though her child was developing the globally powerful language, English. On the other hand, Naomie, hoping to leave the country, directed her children's futures toward other nations where Swedish was perceived

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<sup>395</sup> In Figure 19, Naomie and Anna are located close to one another, capturing their similar educational and economic capital as well as migration histories.

to have limited value. Instead, she found assurance in investing in her native language, French, and English provided through their children's preschools, as these languages were internationally recognised.

### Multilingual Mothers

Of the families discussed so far, language negotiations have typically concerned parents speaking their own individual language. However, there is a further level of linguistic complexity in a several families where the parents themselves have grown up bilingual. Bilingual is used here in a relatively broad term; some parents had two parents<sup>396</sup> who spoke different languages in the home, and others had grown up in monolingual homes but in countries with a different dominating language that they spoke outside the home. In all but one of these cases, it was mothers that were bilingual.

In their aspiration to impart multiple languages to their children and transmit the associated cultural identities, individual parents faced the challenge of determining how to effectively convey more than one language when expert advice recommends the one-parent, one-language approach. In this context, expert advice contrasts with what these parents have to offer their children in terms of linguistic diversity. To handle this predicament, bilingual parents chose which language to prioritise in their homes and used the offer of languages in international preschools as a tool to transmit their other languages.

A number of these bilingual parents had developed their preference for one of the languages they spoke and tended to describe their other languages as “not what it should be” and “not on the level” of their other languages, placing it more as a language to just “speak to some family members” with the level of mastery at times even compared to being like a “foreigner”. The reason for these preferences for languages was seemingly specific to their families and national contexts growing up. Some evidenced that even if they had only spoken one language in the home, their external context and schooling dominated the family language in the long run. In cases where these parents had moved from less to more economically powerful countries as children, they typically focused on this more globally recognised language. Moreover, some had grown up in countries with numerous national languages, such as where Yasmin, where “people grow up speaking at least two languages and then you go to school and English is the official language”, meaning that the one consistent and universally valuable language in this context, English, was preferred by Yasmin and mastered to a higher level.

Most of these parents chose to pass on the language they valued the most and felt most skilled in as they had continued to use it outside of the homes and in their everyday lives, shaped by their cross-border mobility patterns. Their practices regarding passing on their other languages were more to “introduce” the language to their children. For their weaker languages, parents explained that “I

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<sup>396</sup> i.e. the children's grandparents.

have not been very good at speaking to them” in this language, justified by the fact that “it’s a little bit harder to teach when... not all the words come, I simply don’t know all the words”. Reading stories in these languages or learning songs was often as far as these languages went, even if they had higher hopes. One mother explained that they had hired babysitters over two years who spoke her other language, as an attempt to delegate the gift of this language to her child through an external channel. Finding that the child “wasn’t reproducing much” themselves, this strategy was abandoned when more pressing imbalances developed between the two dominant family languages.

The choice of language to focus on among these multilingual mothers was not always clearly based on differences in mastery or their global or local worth. This was especially the case when the languages in question had relatively equal symbolic value. For example, one mother had opted to speak Spanish with her child despite claiming that her most “comfortable language is French”. She had spoken Spanish in her home but was surrounded by French in school and the country where she grew up. While some other Spanish-speaking parents deemed the language a less pragmatic choice for their child’s future, typically when comparing Spanish with English, this mother deemed Spanish as offering more opportunities; it was a “useful commercial business corporate language”. She suggested Spanish was “a more global language; you have more chances”. Although she forwarded a pragmatic argument for Spanish, her interview suggests her desire to develop her Latin American “roots” may have led this choice. She had little experience of Latin America and yearned “to live closer” to her “own culture”, as well as her child “to have a closer base to that”.

She also suggested that her partner’s linguistic capabilities were influential in the choice to focus on Spanish rather than French. Referencing a trip to a French-speaking country, the mother said she noticed that her partner “struggle[d]” and was “getting slightly annoyed... because all the signs are in French”. Thus, opting to invest in her child’s French would be problematic for the family unit. Spanish was a language that her partner had some basic understanding of. During the interview, when they discussed their future plans and the linguistic development of their child, her partner exclaimed that he was “going to learn Spanish”. Her cultural priorities played a significant role in shaping her linguistic decisions, yet lingering guilt was still associated with the omission of a particular language. She expressed her fear, saying, “I don’t want my [child] to resent me at some point for not teaching French, I’m really afraid of that”. When considering the family dynamic, the preference for Spanish over French was justified by her partner’s ability to “understand parts of Spanish”, which passed over some of the responsibility for this decision to her partner. Although she wished for her child to acquire French as well and had considered a bilingual French preschool, she acknowledged that emphasising this language would introduce challenges due to her partner’s limited proficiency. She explained that this approach would make her “feel a little bit guilty” because he would be “completely excluded”. Both choices sparked feelings of guilt as she realised that their combination of languages could not entirely align

with their linguistic goals for their child or the establishment of a fully multilingual family. In this process, the French were to be demoted. Nevertheless, through an English international preschool, her child could acquire English – the language of communication between the parents. This meant her child still had the opportunity to gain linguistic advantages by being exposed to three valued languages (and also a fourth, Swedish, albeit considered less valuable).

International preschools could be used by bilingual parents as a tool for passing on one of their languages if the right languages were on offer. One bilingual English and French mother whose partner was bilingual in Swedish and French described how they had planned to pass on all three languages to their children.

We had this grand plan when our [child] was born that, when she was starting [preschool], I said “right this is great, I’m going to speak French to her”, and then I said to my partner “you’ll speak Swedish”... So basically, the idea was he would speak Swedish and he was happy with that and I would speak in French and [our child] would get English at [preschool].

In this sense, they could use their preschool choice as a third parent. They could keep to the rule of one-parent one-language, by including the third through the child’s social environment in preschool. This “grand plan”, as she called it, seemed unproblematic; they were both comfortable in all three languages and felt that they would, with ease, be able to include all three in the raising of their children. The fact that an English-speaking preschool was available meant they did not need to prioritise languages and risk losing one.

The preschool environment, however, seemed to be incredibly influential in their children’s language preferences. English became their children’s go-to language, using this language to answer French or Swedish utterances at home. This development the mother called “frustrating” and required a “rethink” of the language practices in the home; her partner also switched to using French, meaning they had an entirely French-speaking home. The new practice was not issue-free, causing their children’s “upset... that papa suddenly starting speaking French”, but she highlighted the importance of their change in strategy, that they “had to do it, it was the only way” to ensure their children mastered both of her and her parent’s languages. Despite their efforts and the establishment of new family language practices, their children continued to opt for English. Being bilingual herself, however, meant that this mother could not help but feel a need to support their English when she heard grammatical mistakes were being made. She explained her conversations at home,

it’s a joke because I mean, a conversation will go like this, they’ll say something like ‘can we come with?’ and I’ll correct that sentence because that’s not grammatically correct obviously and I’ll say ‘don’t finish your sentence like that’ and then I’ll say it in English ‘can we come along, can we join, can we join you, can we come with you’, you know just stop finishing your sentence like that because it’s driving me crazy, it’s Swedish and then I’ll repeat the sentence in

French so they get the French side and then I'll ask them in French, so answering my kids takes a long time

Ultimately, their children's preference for English, attributed to their preschool, needed to be counteracted within their family. This included fortifying their other languages and also working on their mastery of English, which the mother, as a native speaker, held at great importance. There was no discussion concerning whether they should alter their children's preschool environment, which can be attributed to the worth that they place in the English language. Moreover, in the Swedish context, where they had been settled for many years and planned to continue to reside, the options for continuing international educational paths that were English-speaking were greater than French-speaking ones.

## Summary of Chapter

This chapter departed from the notion that languages provide social advantage and that international preschools, like international schools, are institutions that can potentially bestow linguistic advantage.<sup>397</sup> Particular to international preschools is that the children who attend them are as young as one year old. Therefore, their presence in the preschool market, coupled with the characteristics of the attending children's age groups, gives rise to a distinctive situation. Leveraging the free-choice policies within the educational market, families have the opportunity to invest in their children's foreign language acquisition (in relation to the Swedish context) during the early stages of linguistic development.

Preschool was regarded by families as an opportunity for their children to cultivate foreign language skills. Whether reinforcing home languages or introducing new ones, preschool was a stage preceding the onset of academic rigour in formal schooling. Children could progress in languages that would grant them entry into specialised educational paths requiring proficiency, such as English or French international schools.<sup>398</sup> These institutions were esteemed for their reputation, social recruitment, and academic achievements, making them prestigious choices. As a result, preschool choices were deliberated upon in consideration of the Swedish school market and schooling options in other national contexts.

Certain languages held significant importance for a broader spectrum of families. English emerged as a viable option for both native English speakers and those whose primary language was a different foreign language. Similar indications were observed for French, although to a somewhat lesser extent. The significance of both French and English preschools for families was evident in the commuting patterns observed, with many families willing to travel longer distances to access these educational institutions. In contrast, Somali preschools exhibited a more lim-

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<sup>397</sup> Mejía, *Power, Prestige and Bilingualism*, 37.

<sup>398</sup> cf. Koh and Ziqi, "Start-up" Capital'.



ited reach, with a recruitment more confined to specific geographic areas. These findings highlight the intersectionality of class and language; Somali preschools occupied a dominated position within the class hierarchies shaping families, as discussed in Chapter Five. Meanwhile, the French and several English international preschools were characterised by their middle-class recruitment.

Although the young age of the children in preschool was deemed a pivotal time for language investments, a number of parents found that investing in such a young age had its drawbacks. These young children had not yet embarked on the process of developing a foundation in their home language, making the linguistic environments found in international preschools potentially influential in shaping their home language development. In families where parents shared the same home language, the impact of their children's preschool environment was generally limited. However, there were exceptions to this, significantly affecting how families perceived their choices and organised language practices at home. The symbolic value assigned to languages played a crucial role in how families navigated the influence of the preschool environment. If the preschool offered a language perceived as prestigious, whether in the Swedish national context or on an international scale, families were less concerned about the potential dominance of such languages.

Multilingual families emerge as a distinct group of interest regarding objectives for fostering multilingualism and the role of preschool in realising these family aspirations. Given the children's young age, many of these families found that their children were developing proficiency in the two family languages at different rates, an issue in regard to their constructions of good multilingual parenting.<sup>399</sup> Preschool environments became integral to negotiations on how to address linguistic imbalances. Struggles within families centred around the choice of preschool to support the weaker language, and it became a point of contention about the responsibility for these imbalances lying in the hands of those who selected the linguistic environment.

Thus, the possibility of utilising preschools in multilingual projects emerged as a complexity in families' management of multilingualism. For families speaking one of the handful of languages offered at international preschools, the preschool landscape provided them with distinct opportunities for their children's multilingualism.

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<sup>399</sup> Piller and Gerber, 'Family Language Policy between the Bilingual Advantage and the Monolingual Mindset'.



## Following the Leader

International education is frequently associated with privileged mobility, both aspired and realised.<sup>400</sup> Essentially, the prevailing rationales posed as driving families' choice of international education revolve around accessing educational institutions suitable for their international lifestyles, or endowing their children with international competencies that can facilitate future cross-border mobility.

Certain social groups, such as the Global Middle Class (GMC), are perceived as integral to the international education sector. These groups, along with other representations thereof, are said to choose international education as an investment in global spheres.<sup>401</sup> The GMC, in particular, has attracted considerable attention in research, particularly regarding the ways in which these middle-class families pursue social advantage and how they transmit the assets associated with mobility to their children.<sup>402</sup> Much of the research that contributes to this understanding, portrays these families as navigating their lives within two main categories: being abroad, in international spaces, or being in their home country. This latter category encompasses their return home as a family or their efforts to establish roots for their children's success in their home countries.<sup>403</sup> In doing so, these mobile families are conceptualised as sharing a common home destination, with parents hailing from the same nation. Their mobile lifestyles are often viewed as a collective endeavour of the family, within which their children's educational choices are intricately intertwined.<sup>404</sup> Absent from these studies is a more thorough consideration of family dynamics, their nuanced interplay with mobility, and their influence on decision-making processes concerning educational choices for children.

The central focus of this chapter is to highlight the significance of family dynamics influenced by migration in shaping the decisions parents make for their children. While not exclusively labelling families as belonging to the GMC, it

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<sup>400</sup> Hayden, 'Transnational Spaces of Education'.

<sup>401</sup> Ball and Nikita, 'The Global Middle Class and School Choice'; and also Beaverstock, 'Transnational Elites in the City', albeit not using the term.

<sup>402</sup> Maxwell et al., 'The Plurality of the Global Middle Class(Es) and Their School Choices - Moving the "field" Forward Empirically and Theoretically'.

<sup>403</sup> Miri Yemini, Claire Maxwell, and Ma'ayan Mizrahi, 'How Does Mobility Shape Parental Strategies – a Case of the Israeli Global Middle Class and Their "Immobile" Peers in Tel Aviv', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, Oktober 2018, 1–15.

<sup>404</sup> Adams and Agbenyega, 'Futurescaping'; Yemini and Maxwell, 'De-Coupling or Remaining Closely Coupled to "Home"'; Beech et al., "'Cosmopolitan Start-up" Capital'.

addresses those who can be categorised as internationally mobile middle-class individuals who have relocated to Sweden facilitated by their highly skilled occupations.<sup>405</sup> The chapter delves into the relationship between migration and occupational and familial structures. Specifically, it examines how individual parents, both mothers and fathers within a family unit, are uniquely affected by this type of migration. As a result, it becomes evident that family dynamics are significantly shaped by migration, which is argued to contribute to structures determining which parent takes the lead in selecting a preschool for their children and who primarily assumes the economic leadership within the family.

Each parent is depicted as encountering specific opportunities and consequences stemming from their migration experience, which becomes part of the negotiation process within the family and influences decisions regarding preschool choice and potential future migrations. In particular, the chapter adds depth to the concepts of home and abroad by elucidating the intricacies experienced by mobile families when their relocation involves one parent returning to their homeland while the other transitions to a new national context. Moreover, the chapter highlights that, as a result of migration, preschool institutions become crucial support systems for parents themselves, reframing the choice of an international preschool not solely as a decision for the child's benefit.

The chapter begins by addressing the gendered structure of parenting, which became evident during the interviews and gained prominence when migration was taken into account. This gender structure is essential for understanding how these families navigate preschool choices for their children, as gendered roles within the family significantly shape the practices and decision-making processes.

## An Underlying Gender Structure

During the formation of the study, the division of parenting roles or gender structures within families were not predefined features of interest. However, the relevance of gender became apparent during the interview process and analysis. The population of participants was the first sign of the significance of gender, as the majority were mothers. In numerical terms, eleven of the 40 parents (comprising 36 interviews) were male, with four participating simultaneously with their female partners. One of the fathers who took part in the study without his partner immediately asked, “so, how many fathers have you been interviewing so far?” illustrating an expectation that fathers may be in the minority, which he had assumed correctly. The somewhat gendered nature of participation often saw mothers assuming the role of spokesperson for their families, resulting in their stories and experiences taking centre stage. This pattern of participation was also

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<sup>405</sup> Despite these families being the focus of the chapter, the whole population of interviewees have been used to shape the analysis, either as points of comparison or pointing towards more general patterns.

associated with the migration backgrounds of families. Of fourteen families where one parent was Swedish, and the other was not, eleven had Swedish fathers, and three had Swedish mothers. Among these three families with Swedish mothers, the interviewed parent was the mother in two cases. Conversely, among the ten families with Swedish fathers, it was primarily their non-Swedish partners, the mothers, who participated in the interviews. Only one Swedish father acted as their family's spokesperson in this scenario.

Although the interview material is somewhat skewed towards capturing the perspective of mothers, there was a notable difference regarding how mothers and fathers presented their families and the distribution of roles within the family. None of the fathers suggested or indicated that they had assumed a greater responsibility in terms of time and effort for parenting their young children compared to their partners. This stands in contrast to many of the mothers, who either explicitly highlighted their amplified role in this domain of family life or conveyed it through their narratives, as elaborated in Chapter Seven concerning languages. Essentially, the gendered pattern of participation, along with the differing ways mothers and fathers tended to portray their family dynamics, highlighted mothers' role in raising their young children. It emphasised the sense of responsibility they experienced as individuals within the family, even when families were adapting to new national contexts together or when mothers were adjusting to a new environment that was the home to their Swedish partner.

The interviews illustrated how parenting cultures and parental leave policies influenced families' perspectives on and arrangements for the division of caregiving responsibilities. This spectrum ranged from families whose children were born in countries where only maternity leave was available, to those whose children were born in Sweden, a context where both parents have access to relatively substantial parental leave options. Those who had children in other countries presented their division of care as rooted in these national parental leave policies, where mothers were constructed as the main caregivers. Even for those whose children were born in Sweden, there were numerous indications from the mothers that their family organised their work and home life in a way so that mothers had "a really long parental leave" or that fathers were "never at home full-time". Such expressions underscored that these parents were aware of the political objectives of parental leave policies in Sweden, yet they had opted for alternative choices for their families. These decisions were sometimes rationalised regarding norms prevailing in other countries, where mothers were the predominant carers. However, it is essential to highlight that this pattern did not apply universally among all families. Notably, some of the Swedish families or those residing in Sweden for several years before having children did not delineate such distinctions between themselves and their partners regarding these divisions of parental leave or parenting responsibilities. While such divisions might have existed among these families if directly questioned on the topic, their omission of this information implies that they perceive their arrangement of care and parental

leave as the standard division in Sweden, even if it still leans heavily towards mothers shouldering the majority of parental leave.<sup>406</sup>

In some interviews, the expressions of gendered roles were particularly clear. Such as Naomie, who mentioned that “generally speaking, anything to [do with the] kids is pretty much on me”. She did not suggest her partner was uninvolved in raising their children, stating that he “takes care of them, obviously”, which was the case for all those mothers who expressed their heightened roles regarding the responsibility of their children. Instead, amongst these parents where more significant differences in roles were expressed, they seemed to separate general parenting tasks, such as dropping off and collecting children from preschool, from other parental responsibilities, such as focusing on learning and development. The latter encompassed making detailed preschool choices, where the mothers highlighted their integral role in driving the process of choosing preschool.

While this gendered structure of families was evident across the range of interviewed families, albeit to varying degrees, it was particularly pronounced among highly skilled employment migrants. The following section delves into families that have migrated and explores how this migration impacts parents in various ways, providing context for how families negotiate their family dynamics, which is the situation in which preschool choices take place.

## Reproducing Occupational and Familial Structures

Families’ migration impacted each parent in distinct ways, which had implications for how families managed their daily lives and divided roles in the family. These structures extended to their preschool choices and arrangements. These cross-border movers presented their migration as joint decisions negotiated within the family for the benefit of both parents or, more specifically, the family unit. However, these relocations often resulted in imbalances between partners regarding their careers and, when they had children, opportunities to care for them. These implications of mobility extended to families where both parents were not from Sweden, and those where one parent was Swedish and one was not. However, the latter group possessed a distinctive characteristic: one parent had connections to their new national context. Therefore, they will be examined in greater detail in the subsequent section of the chapter.

In twenty-three of the interviews, the impact of cross-border mobility on the organisation of their family was discussed, with the others having either met their partners in Sweden or were themselves both Swedish. Among these twenty-three families, whose children all attended either French or English international preschools, there existed a range of variations in terms of when they had relocated to Sweden, their countries of origin, the frequency of their migrations, destinations of their migrations, and the timing of their children’s births during these journeys. All

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<sup>406</sup> Ellingsæter, ‘Nordic Politicization of Parenthood: Unfolding Hybridization?’

had moved to Sweden, facilitated by their work in such occupations as managing consultants, chief executive officers, higher managers, academics, and diplomats. Excluding those belonging to these two latter occupations, the majority were taking up positions in the private sector, often in technology and finance.

### Driving Forces and Accompanying Partners

In these families, where two non-Swedish parent families relocated to Sweden due to or facilitated by employment opportunities, it was the parent deemed to have the higher occupational position that drove these moves. Their careers were constructed as integral to their families, not simply regarding the economic advantages they could receive by investing in this career but also because these occupations provided social status and prestige. As such, families' emphasis on occupational transitions was viewed as advantageous for the entire family unit. For the most part, it was the male partner's (who was, or later became, the father) occupation that drove these moves; they were typically those seen as holding the highest positions. However, there were a few exceptions to this pattern. In some instances, mothers held higher positions in their occupations and were the primary driving force behind the family's relocation. Additionally, in other families, both parents had similar professions and had even advanced to similar degrees within their careers. In this latter group, it is noteworthy that one parent consistently secured employment initially, thus enabling the family's relocation, while the other parent pursued employment opportunities subsequent to the move.

Relocations were viewed as advantageous for the family unit, but migration driven by one parent's career had implications for individual family members. Typically, the father's career would advance, while the mothers did not, or did so to a lesser degree. Migrations guided by the profession of one parent tended to result in disparities in the professional progress of the other parent. Consequently, their family project as "international" families, an identity presented to varying degrees contingent upon their histories of mobility, was predominantly shaped by one parent, particularly the individual spearheading the family's relocation and leading their economic and symbolic prosperity.

Through their migration, these parents continued to advance professionally within their respective fields, pursuing the most advantageous job opportunities and accumulating experiences and skills. While these career advancements were generally beneficial for the family unit as a whole, the accompanying<sup>407</sup> parent often experienced adverse effects at the individual level due to this form of migration. They encountered complex labour market conditions in Sweden, hindered by linguistic requirements and expectations of nationally acquired resources, such as employment experience and educational certifications. Depending on their profession, relocating for "one person's job" was deemed

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<sup>407</sup> The term accompanying is used to illustrate their positions in the nature of their mobility. However, these parents are recognised as agents within their moves and not simply passive in their roles.

challenging, as these accompanying individuals struggled to establish themselves in the labour market, even if this proved to be a temporary setback.

Among families that had relocated across multiple countries, it became evident that initial imbalances were perpetuated, and subsequent moves often revolved around the occupational pursuits of the same parent. As families increasingly relied on one parent for economic stability, maintaining the family's social status hinged on the occupational success of that parent, typically the father. Consequently, the father's social position outside the family unit influenced his position within it, thereby affecting the organisation of family dynamics and, particularly when raising children, the negotiations surrounding childcare. Fathers led the family's occupational and economic endeavours while wielding less influence in familial matters concerning their young children. Conversely, mothers, who faced greater job insecurity, assumed primary responsibility for family life.

Even when couples seemed to present their moves as equal, it was possible to see this was not always the case. For example, when they reflected on this subject, Yasmin and Zack, who were interviewed together, seemed to have somewhat divergent perceptions of what led to their migrations to numerous countries. They presented themselves as an "international" couple, and when asked why they had moved, Yasmin replied it was "for work", that of her partner. Zack added that their moves were "sometimes just looking for something more interesting" and simply feeling "let's go somewhere else". However, these moves were predominantly led by Zack's career opportunities in his "project-based" employment, which meant "I do something for two years here and then a year". In commonality with other movers, they pointed out that their moves were for adventure or trying something new, a possibility specific to these highly skilled groups. However, the focus was skewed towards one parent's occupation. Their "international" family identity necessitated prioritising the parent who possessed the resources to best facilitate such international mobility, while simultaneously requiring the other parent to manage their new national context.

### Career Progression and Labour Market Realities

The point to which these so-called accompanying parents had progressed in their careers influenced how they expressed or illustrated imbalances between themselves and their partners. Furthermore, their phase in life, both in age and whether or not they had children at the time of migration, resulted in different interpretations of their relocations. In their "twenties" or "before... kids" was a time when the desire "to travel" was suitable, a planned phase before settling down. During such moves in these phases of adulthood, there were fewer pressures on careers, and accompanying partners could happily work "with everything", not worrying about particular career progression. They felt that they had an opportunity for privileged migration with their economic situation stable due to their partner's employment. Such periods abroad also provided an opportunity for the accompanying partners to acquire new skills that their employed partners may have missed out on; they



often felt more capable of integrating authentically and mastering the languages “better” than their partners. Early moves, before the full establishment of careers, enabled both partners to acquire transnational assets, whether through employment opportunities in other countries, language proficiency, or simply experiences of living in different national contexts. These resources were highly valued by these middle-class parents, serving as additional assets to their already secure middle-class compositions.

However, relocations that occurred after careers had been established or when accompanying partners desired to focus on their careers were more challenging, particularly depending on their opportunities in the Swedish labour market. This underscores the complexity surrounding the investment in transnational assets, especially when they are perceived to conflict with other investments or priorities. For those planning to “make a life in Sweden”, the conditions they faced, particularly concerning language, were managed heads-on. Having relocated between countries, these families leveraged their employment opportunities to secure their stay in the country. Notably, those intending to start a family or who had recently become parents showed little inclination to return to their country of origin. This reluctance stemmed either from the complexity of negotiations surrounding the choice of country to return to, particularly in cases where parents hailed from different countries, or in instances where both parents were from the same country but perceived Sweden as more advantageous.

Factors contributing to this perception included superior conditions for raising children, enhanced employment prospects, or greater political stability. These families utilised their privileged mobility to settle in this advantageous country.<sup>408</sup> Although they still identified themselves as part of more international spheres (particularly those with children enrolled in English international pre-schools), they did not exhibit the reservations towards Swedish culture commonly observed among temporary residents. For individuals who had already made progress in their language acquisition, this linguistic proficiency provided the accompanying partner with the means to “start a new professional way”. However, for those who were planning or expecting to stay for only a limited duration and were, therefore, hesitant to make significant national investments, access to the labour market was more restricted unless they were able to secure employment in international sectors such as academia.

Specifically, occupations within the public sector that necessitated the transfer of educational credentials, proficiency in the Swedish language, and comprehensive knowledge of the Swedish system proved to be the most challenging to sustain in the new context. This notion can be supported by the analysis in Chapter Five. In Figure 7, where the opposition between highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families intersects with the opposition between established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences, it becomes evident that nationally orientated oc-

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<sup>408</sup> Weiss, ‘The Transnationalization of Social Inequality’.

occupations are situated towards the bottom right of the space, including roles such as teachers and other public sector workers. These occupations were distinctly separated from the area of the map characterised by individuals who had migrated to Sweden. Thus, in conjunction with the insights from interviews, this highlights how certain occupations pose more significant limitations in terms of accessibility when transitioning to a new national context.

Two mothers in such occupations that had accompanied their partners on moves to Sweden expressed that their relocation was causing their careers to “tak[e] a huge hit” even if they suggested that they were not so “career-minded”. Downplaying the issue gave the impression of rationalising their more limited successes. Paths to gaining comparative positions in Sweden were long; thus, such intense investments were deemed “a lot more work than it’s worth”. This sentiment was compounded when individuals compared their professions to their equivalents in their home countries and found that such positions “aren’t really paid as well” in Sweden. Once again, these expressions conveyed the impression that these parents were attempting to rationalise their lack of professional success by attributing it to the specific challenges posed by the Swedish context rather than acknowledging the necessity of investing in nationally rooted assets. The loss of their professional avenues hit hard emotionally as it was a “big part of my identity”. Furthermore, the injustice of being the parent needed to “think again” about their careers as “it’s my job, and I want to keep doing it”. These remarks underscored their perceptions of the imbalance in career focus within their family unit.

While public sector workers were hit hardest, even those who had worked in the private sector faced hurdles. Some could avoid the labour market entirely, whilst others found either part-time or full-time employment. Reports from a number of accompanying mothers indicated that they had taken a step backwards occupationally. When asked if she had a job, one of the mothers who felt that the process of getting her professional qualification recognised in Sweden was too arduous and thus found alternative employment replied, “I do, but it’s not my, it’s a *job*, it’s not a career like I [had]. I have a bachelor’s degree, but I’m doing [beauty treatments]”. Her laughter following this statement underscored her perception of the status of her new employment. She effectively illustrated her awareness of taking a step down in her professional trajectory.

Those who struggled to secure satisfactory employment indicated that the structure of the Swedish labour market worked against them. In particular, those who seemed to see themselves as belonging to some form of “expat” group, typically those from English-speaking countries, forged this belief together. In doing so, they gave the impression that they were not accustomed to being at these disadvantages. “We know three people in our relatively small circle who are expat women working in Sweden who lost their jobs in the fifth or sixth month of their probation periods, in other words, before the legal protections”, explained Harry, whose partner had difficulties finding employment. Their discussions highlighted the workings of gender again; accompanying females faced this problem, which can be understood as capturing more the gendered structure of

such mobility rather than gender differences in labour market establishment. Moreover, these shared perspectives highlighted how the national context was conceived as constraining their family's success; it was the Swedish labour market that influenced family dynamics. Such expressions shifted the focus away from the family itself or the imbalances created by their relocations, placing it instead on the external environment surrounding them.

Although these mothers met with issues, finding it "very difficult to get a job", by "blindly just looking for jobs... I did this for two years and it's like zero", their somewhat self-isolating groups were also a resource for finding employment, albeit not typically comparative to that they had previously held. "I only got the job because I knew somebody through my expat connections; otherwise, I mean, I applied everywhere". Thus, despite these families' lack of a Swedish social network to rely on for employment opportunities, they were able to establish more "international" networks with individuals who had achieved greater stability. Consequently, they can be viewed as forming parallel social circles that may not enable them to attain the opportunities they initially anticipated, but simultaneously provide them with an advantage within these networks that may be more inaccessible to Swedes.

With an overrepresentation of families in which mothers had followed their male partners for employment opportunities, there is a clear demonstration of how occupational imbalances impact the dynamics within families regarding childcare. More mothers found themselves in precarious working situations, albeit temporarily. If they relocated to Sweden with young children or had children soon after arrival, mothers often took on the primary role of childcare, even if they "wanted to have a very equal relationship", as the family's economic needs depended on the father. Furthermore, the role of mothers as child carers was exacerbated in cases where families had previously lived in countries with more pronounced gender norms regarding the care of young children. Whilst migration reproduced occupational and familial structures, a further aspect that was pronounced within the interviews was whether or not both parents were moving to a new country or whether one was Swedish. This provides a situation for illuminating the relevance of the recognition of nationally acquired assets, and how these became intrinsic in the dynamics of families.

## Moving and Moving Home

Among those families whose relocation was facilitated by employment, in the sense that they were offered employment in Sweden, seven were headed by Swedish fathers who secured employment, and three by Swedish mothers. In one case, the families' decision to move to Sweden was predominantly facilitated by the mother, who was not Swedish. Swedish for these families refers, for the most part, to being born in Sweden and having grown up in the country. However, one more family has been added to this group, and in their case, it means that

the father has gained Swedish citizenship, speaks the language, and has had a career in the country as a young adult. Of these families, in all but three cases, the non-Swedish parent was interviewed, suggesting a general desire to share their opinion about their experiences and their position as a spokesperson for their family as the predominant driver of the choice of international preschool.

Even amongst these separations of cross-border moving families, some key differences exist. For example, a few had moved early in their relationships with the intention of building their lives in Sweden, which, in all cases, were female partners moving to Sweden to be with their Swedish partners. Others had split their time between Sweden and their partner's country before this current move. A few had even lived in other countries together before relocating to Sweden (on a scale of temporality). Furthermore, there is variation in the length of time families had lived in Sweden when the interviews took place, ranging from a couple of years to over twenty years. The result of this was that some parents felt more in the midst of their process of building their lives in Sweden (whether this was to be temporary or permanent), and others had spent many years in this process.

For those few mothers whose move to Sweden was, from the offset, deemed more or less permanent, the conditions of migration were clear; they needed to establish themselves in the country. Future moves were clearly off the cards as fathers had expressed that they would "never leave Sweden" or that a move to their partner's country would not be possible as the labour market was "tough" and people "work a lot more", meaning the conditions placed on family life were less optimal. Thus, these mothers became heavy investors in Sweden, taking the "leap of faith" and being "brave" to undergo such a move. The success of their structure of migration lay in their hands, and learning the language was paramount. With the focus on building their lives in the country, they could focus on this, placing all time and investments into the necessary skills needed for establishing themselves, switching to speaking Swedish with their partners as their proficiency grew and seemingly avoiding constraining their social network to such "expat" groups that some other mothers invested in.

An exception to this group of mothers was Mariana, who, whilst moving to Sweden on a more permanent basis, did not see the language as pivotal to establishing herself in Sweden. It had been her employment that initially facilitated their move; within her international company, she was able to transfer to Sweden. Her partner was Swedish, so they judged he would easily be able to gain employment. As it was Mariana who immediately established herself in the labour market, in a position where the Swedish language was not needed, she could evade the need to learn Swedish and immerse herself in Swedish social circles.

Her strong social position outside the family permeated the dynamics of their family life. Even within their household, she leveraged a distinction between the Swedish and international spheres, emphasising their international side with less concern about her children acquiring nationally dominant resources. However, it is important to note that despite her stronger occupational position and her partner's "less demanding job", the responsibility for childcare remained

predominantly hers. This contrasted with other mothers whose weaker occupational positions often led to them assuming the responsibility for childcare decisions. Mariana continued to take the lead in this domain, choosing “long-term nursing” despite her work strains, which illustrated how gendered family practices persist regardless of parents’ social positions outside of the family.

Excluding these mothers, it was generally the case that a move to Sweden when the father was Swedish was planned as temporary but later transformed into semi-permanent or permanent (albeit with an always-discussed possibility for further moves). The majority explained that they had told their partners they would stay “two years max”, with two to three years often being the timeframe they planned their lives. With temporary plans, less emphasis was placed on creating careers in Sweden; some mothers reported attempting to work remotely with their previous employers or clients. As time passed, they realised they had lived in the country for numerous years and were still linguistically disadvantaged by their lack of early investments in the language. They were “barely” speaking Swedish, “struggling” and travelling home for “long breaks”, either with or without their partners.

In these situations, where one parent felt at a disadvantage to their partner due to their differences in usable resources in the Swedish context, their move to Sweden gave the impression of them making a sacrifice for the good of the family unit. This reflected somewhat those families comprised two foreign parents; however, when one parent was Swedish, imbalances were accentuated as the individual leading the migration had experiences and thus resources recognised and applicable in Sweden. When returning home, Swedes typically had their social network; they returned to friends, family, and even colleagues. Even if these networks were limited due to their lengthy time living in other countries, their few contacts and language abilities could swiftly transform into stable networks and prestigious occupational positions, which tended to influence their desire to stay in the country. “I got here and those roots just came out of his feet”, was an expression uttered by one non-Swedish mother explaining the process of their originally temporary plans to reside in Sweden turning to more permanent.

Although these changes in plans tended to be experienced as accentuating their difficulties in Sweden, in the sense that they may have dealt with their situation in a different way if such long-term plans had been negotiated earlier, they were not always experienced negatively. They were both a point of negotiation where Swedish partners focused on what their partners “needed to be happy”, and they were the stability some had been yearning for during their mobility. Moreover, if families had children or were planning to have children, staying in Sweden, a country with relatively generous family policies, was positive, a perception that even the non-Swedish families forwarded. Sweden was more “family-friendly” than many of the countries they had moved from. Both parents would “have a lot of time together”, and the “values” of Sweden were seen as progressive. “The society they’re going to grow up in” was important for parents, who could use this logic to justify living in a country where they were faced with difficulties if it provided their children with the values and lives they desired. In comparison to

capital cities in other countries, Stockholm was also more “suitable” for families with small children. Not only due to the aforementioned work-home life but economically, families could live close to the centre without being “cramped” in the smaller homes they could afford in other more “expensive” cities. All of these utterances gave the impression of them rationalising the renegotiation of their family identity. Despite having previously embraced an international lifestyle, they were becoming more national. They articulated the logic behind their decision, emphasising the importance of staying for their family’s well-being and securing the collective positions of all family members, even if it meant facing obstacles for one member, typically the mother.

Essentially, the transition from temporary stays to more permanent represented a renegotiation of their family identity. They were no longer solely “international” but were gradually becoming more “national” and “Swedish”. This transition could potentially lead to contention, especially when one parent had more opportunities for success than the other. Consequently, this process was intricately linked to how they managed their preschool choices. Opting for an international preschool, typically advocated by non-Swedish mothers and often supported by fathers, became a means of preserving their international identity, albeit with some fathers wavering due to linguistic developments, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

One family provides a distinction to this pattern of the Swedish partner wanting to settle in Sweden. Patricia and her partner, who had previously been living together in another country where they had their child, explained that they moved to Sweden as her partner “told” her that “maybe it’s better to have a good family life here”. However, her partner attempted to prevent them from rooting themselves in the country. Despite feeling that she was “a little bit isolated” in Sweden and at the time of the interview, she was not working, instead spending her time struggling with Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) courses, she wanted “to stay here and settle down”. “We can buy a little bit big[ger] apartment or big villa<sup>409</sup>... then live like the local people”, she explained. However, her partner wanted to move, which can be attributed to his identity and migration background. He was not born in Sweden; instead, he moved to the country as a young adult. Although he had learnt the language, owned property, and had started his career in the country, Patricia said that he did not identify with the Swedish culture, instead having a “more English-speaking country culture”. His parents had moved to an English-speaking country with him during his school years, a recognised transnational educational strategy.<sup>410</sup> His parents’ sacrifices and investments in relocating for their children can be seen as forming his feelings “that he needs to move, if he lost the ability to move... he’s not safe enough”. Thus, despite her partner having acquired a number of recognised Swedish assets

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<sup>409</sup> Meaning here a single-family house in a suburban area.

<sup>410</sup> Waters, “Roundabout Routes and Sanctuary Schools”.

as an adult, such as property ownership, employment connections, and mastery of the language, he perceived his cultural assets as more aligned with other national spaces. He acknowledged the value of his upbringing in an English-speaking country, despite his parents not being from that country, and orientated himself more towards these spaces. As a result, he avoided fully embedding himself, Patricia, and his child in the national context of Sweden.

Excluding Patricia and her partner, who were the one family in this group that did not feel either parent belonged to the Swedish culture, families tended to illustrate an imbalance regarding the possibility of passing on their culture to their children. With their children growing up in Sweden and having one Swedish parent, they were surrounded by Swedish culture. However, for the other parent, their desire for their children to feel belonging was an aspect of their parenting that demanded attention. There were worries that their children would not identify in the same way as themselves, which they feared would create an emotional separation. Moreover, these parents felt that they could be isolated from their families, the odd one out. This is a theme that was touched upon in Chapter Seven. The choice of international preschool was a way to counteract this, just as it was regarding the dominance of the Swedish language. Options for educating their children in international ways in their new national context were part of negotiations to move to Sweden, stay in Sweden, and plan to leave Sweden. In this sense, the parent, typically the mother, could counteract the cultural imbalance by taking the lead in the preschool choice process.

## Mothers Leading Choices

In the previous sections, migration among these middle-class families was shown to structure family dynamics. Moves based on one parent's employment created a situation where accompanying partners were met with new hindrances to their career progressions. Amongst the interviewed families, it emerged that migration taking place with young children or just before having children tended to result in one parent taking more responsibility for the care of their child, while the other became the family's economic stability. Among the interviews, it was primarily mothers at home more than fathers who worked. It was also mothers who took the primary responsibility for the process of choosing preschool. This cannot, however, be solely attributed to the impact of migration, as touched upon in the preceding section where Mariana's situation was addressed.

In the Stockholm municipality, where the majority of the interviewed families lived, and their children attended preschool, families can join waiting lists for preschools when their child turns six months old.<sup>411</sup> In this period, mothers tend to

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<sup>411</sup> Families can apply for preschools before this date but they join the waiting list the day that their child turns six months.

be at home with their children,<sup>412</sup> which was also apparent among the interviewees. These gendered patterns of parental leave provide mothers with more significant opportunities for exploring options for preschool. The six-month application date was a marker used frequently by parents when discussing their choice practices. The six-month “rule” was, whilst being the first instance one can officially stand in line for preschool, simultaneously seen as the deadline by parents. Having applied later than the day their child turned six months was, for those families whose children were born in Sweden, expressed as a shortcoming in their parenting. Meeting the six-month “deadline” was of symbolic importance; it resembled a mantra of good parenting, or more specifically, mothering. The interview with Yasmin and Zack, two non-Swedish parents, illustrates this.

Jenny:... And when did you start thinking about preschool?

Yasmin: I’m kind of. I think we were kind of late to, just like talking to people, because we had moved here when I was pregnant... Then we started to meet people and make friends and other friends who were pregnant, started talking about preschool... they had, not experienced with this, also their first kids that first, this group of ladies that I met, first kids but also like international families, but they had Swedish partners, we, both of us are not Swedish so we didn’t really know the system. And so that was when it started to think like, “oh, we need to start thinking about it”. We didn’t realise that it was waiting lists and stuff like that. And I think then around like, [discusses quietly dates with partner] we were kind of late.

Zack: What do you mean? When we started actually thinking, looking for it?

Yasmin: Yeah, yeah. Like we didn’t

Zack: I mean, it’s like you, you think about it all the, kind of as part of, you know, having a kid. But I think we knew that

Yasmin: I was thinking about surviving [laughs]

Zack: No but I mean, we knew that after six months in Sweden you can start doing sort of, you know, get in line... because we knew that the kids can start from one year. So, for us, I think it was kind of a deadline that we thought “ok by six months we should have like a good idea and we should do all that kind of, you know, go and check and visit the preschools before he is six months”. So we sort of started doing this slowly

Yasmin: Yeah but we were late because it was around December.

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<sup>412</sup> Statistics from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency reveal that mothers predominantly take parental leave during the first six months, and they also tend to take more days than fathers on average. Försäkringskassan, ‘Delas föräldrapenningdagarna jämställt?’, accessed 1 November 2023, <http://www.forsakringskassan.se/>.



Zack: Yeah, but it's not late.

Yasmin: Yeah, yeah. I mean, around six months.

It was Yasmin who bore the emotional responsibility for their "late" application; she understood the importance of the waiting lists in the municipality, and being home with her child at this time, it was apparent she felt this task was her obligation.

It was the mothers who expressed that they had the responsibility of finding out about the waiting list system, which, even when they discovered this "weeks before I was about to give birth", was experienced as late. Even in families where fathers were Swedish, there tended to be a lack of knowledge regarding the queue system and the significance of applying early within their social group. These fathers' lack of this relevant information was often attributed to them having lived abroad for substantial amounts of time, an issue commonly associated with these mobile middle classes.<sup>413</sup> However, the responsibility of acquiring this knowledge was not portrayed as belonging to these fathers, despite their greater opportunities for interacting with Sweden's bureaucratic system. Instead, it was constructed as falling within the domain of mothers. Anna, a mother from America with a Swedish partner, retold her experience of discovering that the only strategy for receiving a place in a good preschool was through early application,

Jenny: And when was it you started thinking "ok now is the time to start looking at preschools"?

Anna: ohh, well I'm not typical I will tell you, apparently [laughs], I was like, I mean they tell you at six months you know... that she can start to be put on the list and I was probably... like 8 months and then I asked, I started thinking about this and "what we're going to do?" and they're like "what, it's two months, you've already missed the deadline, you were supposed to do it all the day she turned 6 months" and I was like "gulp", so... she was around 8 months... so then I started just every day trying to go and see places and do viewings

Her realisation of missing the "deadline" was a guilt-filled moment, seemingly accentuated by the reaction she received, being told that she was "supposed to do it" the moment her child had turned six months. She invested her time heavily in righting this wrong by going "every day" to visit preschools. How "late" families felt that they got to learn the workings of the preschool application process illustrated their frustrations with raising their children in a foreign country. Moreover, it reflected their experiences of being in situations where they lacked the vital information that they would have held in their home countries or at least gained in a way they deemed natural.

The interviewed mothers described their process of choosing a preschool, where they visited and "observed several preschools". In most cases, fathers had

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<sup>413</sup> E.g. Waters, "Roundabout Routes and Sanctuary Schools".

also visited. However, the mothers gave the impression of having more detailed perceptions and opinions regarding their preschool options and putting in more time researching their options.<sup>414</sup> Harry, for example, explained that his partner Isabel “spent more time” visiting the potential preschools. A point that Isabel agreed with and furthered, “I visited them, but also I researched them in other ways as well, so on like [social media] groups and any kind of forum I could find”. Fathers were presented as influential in making final decisions, but the ground-work was predominantly carried out by mothers, even in cases where they were not Swedish and their partners were.

From the interviews, it is possible to suggest that the mothers’ emphasised responsibility for childcare and preschool choice bears elements of delegation from within the family as a result of the symbolic structures. The father’s generally more prestigious and economically strong position outside the family sphere tended to correlate with mothers assuming a primary role in childcare responsibilities within the household. Nevertheless, it is evident that external societal norms exert significant influence on the division of these roles within the family structure. In particular, the perpetuating importance of being a good mother, an active and present mother “involved” in schooling, who goes the extra mile for her children, remains a fundamental aspect of identity for the middle classes. Indeed, the gendered dynamic can be perceived as a form of power within the family framework, challenging conventional notions of delegation. Mothers aligned with the societal ideal of motherhood often assumed the responsibility for nurturing their children, leveraging their gendered position to ensure that their family conforms to societal expectations regarding upbringing. Consequently, they predominantly shouldered the responsibility for educational choices, particularly during the early stages of their children’s lives. Moreover, for those mothers whose partners were Swedish, the extra effort that they put into choosing a preschool was also related to the importance they placed on their children attending an international preschool. In families where mothers were of non-Swedish origin and fathers were Swedish, mothers often undertook the task of investigating international educational opportunities for their children. This responsibility stemmed from the realisation that they had more at stake in promoting the international aspect within their family.

In light of this, the mothers’ proactive approach of “googling and finding reviews” and conducting “quite a lot of research” conveyed a sense of self-delegation in assuming this task. These mothers asked “questions on like international Facebook groups”, which gathered other non-Swedes in similar situations of highly skilled middle-class migration. Such groups belonged more to the domain of these mothers than the fathers, who were “happy to go ahead”, following the lead of the “international” mother who was more concerned with accessing such international environments.

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<sup>414</sup> See Vincent and Ball, ‘A Market in Love?’; Vincent and Ball, *Childcare, Choice and Class Practices*.

In one sense, this can be seen as a part of the negotiations of Swedish parents to move or stay in the country. They could make their partners “happy” by supporting international preschool choices, even if they themselves were less interested. Mothers presented these educational choices as “deal breakers” to their moves to Sweden, for staying in the country, or simply a way to counteract the dominance of Swedish culture. As one mother explained, her “sales pitch” of her favoured preschool, an international parental cooperative, was only accepted by her Swedish partner after she said she “would take” on the extra tasks that parental cooperatives needed from their enrolled families, a clear example of a within-family negotiation about preschool choices. When another parent was asked about whether her Swedish partner shared her desire to educate their children in the international French institutions in Sweden, she replied laughing, “that’s a good question, he’s never complained, so I assume he thinks it’s okay”.

Such expressions underscored the influence that the gendered and migration-related compositions of families exerted on the responsibility of determining educational paths for their children within national contexts, especially in cases where fathers were Swedish, and mothers were not.

## Children and Preschools as a Parental Resource

Throughout the interviews, parents consistently framed their preschool choices as being made for the benefit of their children. However, it is noteworthy that these choices aimed at benefiting children were intrinsically linked to the lives of the parents themselves. Their decisions reflected their combinations of parental assets and their endeavours to forge a cohesive family unit while adhering to the joint project approach of leveraging the symbolic worth of both parents in their children’s upbringing. Not yet fully explored is the significance that their children and their preschools had for the lives of parents. International preschools were intrinsic to parents for their social interactions and the building of their social networks in Sweden, which is the focus of this section.

Firstly, it should be noted that the timing of the interviews somewhat clouded this theme. Parents’ opportunities for socialising were limited by the ongoing pandemic, which predominantly impacted those who moved to Sweden during the pandemic or those whose children began preschool at this time. However, despite these constraints, socialising and building connections were aspects of the interviews and a topic that shed light on the significance of preschools and having young children in these parents’ lives.

Building social networks in new countries was typically discussed as not being so straightforward. Families had moved from countries where they had built secure social networks, either over their lifetime if they were first-time movers or over several years if they had studied or worked in other foreign countries. In particular, those who had moved from countries where they had studied as international students tended to discuss their social groups as rather established.

Expectedly, for more recent movers to Sweden, their friendships had “suffered”, and in comparison to their previous networks, their social circles in Sweden could be “bigger”. Those who had moved for employment in professions such as specialists, consultants, middle managers, and academics saw their employment as an avenue to make connections.

However, two families could not use their employment as a path to socialising, as their positions were deemed too senior. Workplace hierarchies created symbolic boundaries that limited their options. He is “the boss, so we cannot make friends at work”, one mother explained, referring to her partner whose occupation as a CEO for a large international company had driven their move to Sweden. Another parent, Harry, described how his workplace provided few opportunities for making connections, which he put down to the fact that his “role has changed quite a lot” and that he had moved countries despite working in the same company. His mention of his “role” hinted towards his advancement in seniority, and was articulated more explicitly by his partner, saying to him that “you’re finding as well in that your respect level with people has changed, so being more senior than some people that you were more peers with previously makes you feel a bit detached, and because you’re in a management position, this kind of being just friends... the dynamic in any company makes that harder when you are more senior”, which Harry acknowledged was “true” before changing the subject. With workplaces not being suitable arenas for making friends, mothers took on the responsibility of building their family’s social networks.

Aside from these two families, those whose moves to Sweden were facilitated by employment saw the workplace as a route to social contacts; it was a clear path to meeting socially similar people. However, as these families were all parents and often with just one parent at work on arrival, the other was faced with a situation where their partner was “working full-time”, accentuating their own need for social contact as they were isolated. Having children was both a dynamic with specific needs; they wanted friends who would fit in with their family lives and who were in the same phase of life, but the children themselves were also a resource for meeting others.

Those who had previously relocated with children already knew that a successful strategy was “to make friends through the kids”. Others discovered this in Sweden, as they started to attend events for new parents, typically mothers. At such events, they came into contact with others searching for similar friendships or others in similar situations. In particular, “baby group[s]” were a swift path to new social contacts with other mothers. Those who had babies, either born in Sweden or just before their relocation, described how they had searched for “mums” groups for “expats” or attended parental groups offered as part of the local healthcare system. Although the parental groups were not limited to mothers, it was apparent from the interviews that the mothers attended them and they had met other “mums”. Generally, when mentioning their social contacts with other parents, it was other “mums” or “group of ladies” that were mentioned. Others had also attended open-preschools, drop-in pedagogical centres where

parents stay with their children, which was a further chance for parents to start “meeting people”.

Such groups were evaluated on their ability to offer social contacts. The language used at these groups and their ability to embed mothers in either local or “ex-pat” social circles were points of evaluation of whether they were worth attending. Even if they “had mostly Swedish people”, they were valued for offering social contact and the chance to have “coffee” with other mothers if the particular group of attendees were deemed socially suitable. Attending these groups gave mothers access to information regarding what other families were considering for preschool choice; they could discover which preschools “everybody was trying to get in” to. Thus, even those mothers with little understanding of the Swedish system could get first-hand information from other mothers. However, the use of these groups depended on the relevance of this knowledge to their family. The preschools advocated by Swedes in these groups were only beneficial for those mothers considering the possibility of “Swedish preschools”, which typically encompassed only some of those with Swedish partners. Instead, for those who were more focused on international educational trajectories, typically through English international preschools and schools, these more Swedish groups emerged as simply a point for social contact in their lives at home with young children, where they would only attend “occasionally”. It was the “expat” groups these families were more interested in, more frequently attended, and became routes to meet “best friend[s] here”.

The importance of finding similar migrant families as themselves was, for many non-Swedish mothers, even those with Swedish partners, a “resource” to counteract their lack of a close social network. They felt comfort in finding others in the “same situation” as them; there was a level of security in making friends who were not Swedish; “the expats tend to stay together”. As discussed in Chapter Six, non-Swedish parents often compared their cultural norms to those of Swedes, leading to a sense of isolation. However, accessing these “international” friendship groups proved to be a significant asset, allowing them to swiftly establish connections within a middle-class community. Those who had young children in Sweden before they started preschool were able to leverage these groups to gather information on international preschools, primarily those that offered English-speaking programs. These groups provided them with the knowledge that is typically employed by middle-class families when navigating educational choices.<sup>415</sup> However, it was primarily through attending international preschools that these “international” friendships were solidified.

Through both the interviews and the analysis of social recruitment in Chapter Five, it becomes evident that international preschools are not solely attended by families with foreign backgrounds. Instead, both Swedish families and non-Swedish families (as well as those with mixed Swedish and non-Swedish backgrounds) enrol their children in these institutions, albeit to varying degrees,

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<sup>415</sup> Ball and Vincent, “I Heard It on the Grapevine”; Holloway, ‘Local Childcare Cultures’.

depending on the particular institution. However, the interviews with non-Swedish mothers illustrated that despite being in these mixed environments, they tended to form friendships primarily with other non-Swedish mothers.

Even if they mentioned that there were “Swedish families” in the preschool who were “fantastic”, the non-Swedes shared a common issue of not having a “safety net” and feeling “a bit maybe more isolated because they don’t have families and stuff”. The Swedish mothers were seen as not having the “same need to connect with others” as they did, who were “looking for somebody else to socialise with”. They did not have the same “intention” with the international preschool, instead just thinking it was “cool” that their children could access an international environment (and typically the English language). Such expressions illustrated that these non-Swedish mothers saw their choice of preschool not solely about their child’s social or linguistic environment but also as a choice for them as individuals trying to forge lives in the country.

Through their child’s preschool, non-Swedish mothers could access “a very good community” of people like them who were not “the average Joe”. They found it “easier” to “connect” with families from other countries. Dee described that “from day one” at the preschool, all the parents wanted to “go for coffee because we don’t have anyone else to go for a coffee with”. Whilst that was not quite the case for her, due to having lived in Sweden many years and having a “large group of friends”, she indicated still not being as deeply rooted as she could seem, as her friends would “revert to one of their five best friends”, a safety net that she had “never felt”. Instead, deep friendships with other non-Swedes could be formed due to these parents’ more precarious positions; “they’re texting more and asking if you want to hang out”. These mothers held on to one another for their social network, priding themselves on being open to anyone new in the “same situation”. Some parents had formed “a mum chat group” with the other mothers in the preschool, where they were said to be like “each other’s families”, collecting children for each other if needed and “help[ing] out”.

The preschools themselves became a resource for parents who knew little about the Swedish system, spanning from education to health. This was through both staff members and the organisation of such programmes as “class parent”. With a number of staff members themselves being foreign, they were said to understand the plights of migrating to Sweden. These staff members could become empathetic individuals who could “recognise” parents’ situations and reassure them. Some of the preschools were particularly aware of this situation on an institutional level, and it was part of their offer to support families in their difficulties. One staff member at a fee-charging international preschool acknowledged that families new to moving countries often need help to know “where to access support”, to understand Swedish bureaucracy, or just help to feel at home. This was said to be mainly a “mummy thing”, referencing the gender structures of highly skilled mobility.

Preschools were also the arena for parents to navigate their later school choices. Staff at preschools were said to sometimes indicate which schools children tended

to progress to. Moreover, preschools were spaces where parents discussed with one another what schools they were contemplating or signing up for. However, such discussions could only take place if parents trusted the opinions of those at the preschool, which seemed primarily rooted in class similarity. While this was not an issue for nearly all families who had enrolled at their desired international preschools, Georgia, who was assigned an international preschool for her youngest child, who was yet to reach the age of attending a fee-charging international preschool, provides an example where she felt unaligned with the setting's class-based recruitment. She explained that "very few parents spoke English", pointing out that they were not Swedish but "people from all over the world". However, they "were not in the same phase" as her; they were "from completely different worlds". She contrasts parents at this preschool, whom she claimed that there "was no way we would hang out", to those at a preschool she later attended where parents "were in the same situation, educated, social". Only when other families had similar class backgrounds or trajectories could they be trusted for knowledge and perceptions on educational choices.

Contacts made in preschool extended out into their everyday lives, eased by the child-centred format of "play dates" at the weekends where they "go to the forest to play". More parent-centred activities developed along with friendships, such as eating "dinner together". Again, the ease of building these social networks can be seen as based on their precarious social positions; they are open to new arrivals and temporary friendships who share their distinct position as not being Swedes or "fully Swedish families". These groups tended to be of mixed nationalities, and "some of them are just like one year in Stockholm, and then they will go", which tended not to be seen as problematic but rather a positive aspect that facilitated strong friendships to form swiftly. These middle-class migrating families living in the city centre, in particular those at English-speaking preschools (even if this is not their home language), did not just keep their social circles to those parents at their preschool but found that people in the same situation "seem to know each other", meaning whilst their children might attend different international preschools, their communities overlapped.

## Negotiating Future Moves

Future moves were either a possibility or a definite plan among the previously mobile families. Negotiations for future mobility revolved around the family's best interests. Their discussions involved "weigh[ing] everything up", evaluating what was "good for the kids", "their family", and making sure "everyone was happy". However, as shown, previous mobility tended to secure one parent's career progression and thus place the families' social position predominantly in their hands. These structures seemed to perpetuate when it came to future moves, as they need to be rationalised and facilitated by employment opportunities. In this sense, the one parent's career frequently took priority, and possible reloca-

tions depended on “what kind of job it was for [my partner], whether it’s interesting for him or the right sort of thing”. Thus, it was not only simply meeting the family’s economic needs that drove migration but also the evaluation of particular career paths. After having children, educational possibilities became inherent to their decisions.

The more similar the social positions of the individual parents, the more leverage there was for the negotiation of logical moves, meaning families comprising two parents with high positions had more at stake and more accessible routes. When both parents had the option of moving within employment in international arenas, which eased issues of migration, “these big decisions” were “very easy”, making them simply “over a coffee”. A contrasting pattern can be exemplified by Patricia and her family’s trajectory. Whilst Patricia held a Master’s degree, the career of her partner facilitated their move to Sweden and has seemingly been the family’s financial security. For her and her child’s sake, a move back to her Asian country would be positive. However, for her partner and the family unit as a whole, this is not a possibility. She explained,

We [have a] low chance to move to [Asian country]. It is because [my partner] cannot function. I can function, I will feel very happy, [our child] will feel very happy, but he cannot function, then the family will also not. I mean, he will be like me right... now I’m here, I become this kind of role, I will suffer because of the language barrier and [husband] can go out to work. But if we move to [Asia], it will be the opposite

Patricia evidences a familial structure in which her partner, who holds a higher occupational position and is responsible for the family’s economy, leads the family’s mobility; she is destined to follow. Her interview was filled with exasperation about not being able to establish herself in Sweden, hindered by her lack of relevant linguistic skills. Her move to Sweden was riddled with “sacrifice”, “compromise”, and “inconvenience”; she is forced to “adapt” for the family. As it is her partner’s employment that predominantly gives them “the advantage... the ability of mobility” to continue to reap the benefits gained through their mobility, the logic of the family is that Patricia’s partner’s employment choices drive their mobility. Any idea of returning home is deemed impossible due to her partner facing those difficulties that she herself faces currently, which are more problematic for the family when faced by him.

Patricia had little move for manoeuvrability when it regarded her family’s future cross-border mobility, whilst others did. An example of this was Dee. She met her Swedish partner in Sweden, and despite her lower and less prestigious educational certification than her partner (bachelor’s degree and master’s degree, respectively) she held a comparable occupation position, both working as higher managers. Their previous mobility had been driven by her, and she noted that her partner had not worked during the time and had been “frustrated that he couldn’t really do more”. She explained their negotiations for possible future mobility.



I have sort of an opportunity where we could go [abroad] for six months and that's not really, [although my partner] is fluent in English, he wouldn't feel comfortable working in English and I would say if there's any friction in our relationship that's sort of the friction, but he knows we're going to [North America] at some point.

Her offer of a shorter stay in an English-speaking country seemed under discussion due to her partner's deemed linguistic disadvantage. However, whilst she may have been willing to give up this chance for her partner's wishes, she clearly noted that when it comes to finding opportunities in her home country, which is also English-speaking, there are no negotiations; they will relocate there. Her plans for a stint in her home country were both driven by her "ambitions... outside of Sweden as well" and the want for her children to "understand what it means" to be from their home country. The latter gave her manoeuvrability within the family by placing legitimacy on the children's benefit from relocation.

Children were frequently said to be the focus of family discussions regarding whether to stay in Sweden or migrate again. These children were the focus of their family projects; parents worked to ensure that their children had the best opportunities in life. This involved forming shared ideas of what the most advantageous trajectories were, which, for two parents with different national backgrounds and knowledge of various nation-states, involved imagining what these trajectories could look like and comparing them. The influence that national cultures could exert on their children needed to be evaluated; some countries were not suitable for raising their children if they were deemed conservative or did not hold similar values.

Education was also a point of evaluation; as children progressed through their preschool years, families had time pressures regarding what educational system they wanted their child to undertake their schooling in. Their preschool choices had taken into consideration their children's possibilities, often choosing international preschools as a way to ensure further mobility and keep options open regarding the countries that they could move to. Influential here was parents' beliefs in the Swedish system, and whether following a Swedish trajectory was globally competitive. One American mother, Leah, explained that whilst she had moved to Sweden with her Swedish partner, the plan was to return to America for her children's education; she justified her choice of an international preschool as integral to this. However, during her time in Sweden, she had grown to trust the Swedish educational system more.

Leah: Okay, so no offense but I never really liked that, I never trusted the Swedish education system, so I always thought we would want to move back by the time the kids reached the gymnasium level here, that we'd have to be in the U.S if we wanted the kids to have the opportunity to go to a university in the U.S that we would sort of need that level that sort of, that level of rote memorization for their high school education just so they'd be competitive to get into U.S. universities. But now I've kind of changed my mind, appreciating the project and group learning here more and so I don't know if I think my kids have to be going through high school in the U.S... I'm converted now, though, I think I'm much

more Swedish and I think it's okay that they play a lot and they can play when they're in ninth grade still, I'm okay now, [laughs] I'm loosening up.

Jenny: So has it been a bit of a process for you becoming more Swedish?

Leah: Yes I think they sort of reached, It was like a slow steady and now I've reached the plateau of acceptance. And it's an okay way that it's done here. It's okay, there's enough tradeoffs that, yeah that I don't, I don't know if I think that format for education is superior, at all, and I'm okay if my kids don't get in, and aren't even competitive to get into U.S. universities, like so be it [laughs]. I think that was much more important to me that that was an opportunity, but it's okay. I think Swedish universities are okay too.

Her change of heart and their plans to stay in Sweden can be attributed not solely to becoming "more Swedish", but also to her partner's secure position in academia, along with her own successes in finding employment in the same field. This reduces the need for her to rely on her more familiar routes to social advantage, such as the globally competitive American education system.

Children's educational opportunities could potentially override family dynamics that hinge on the employment opportunities of one parent, primarily if these opportunities are based in home countries that hold great symbolic worth. Felicity exemplifies this scenario, as she is the only parent who could leverage their child's schooling as a bargaining chip to facilitate a move to her home country, even though neither she nor her partner had secured employment opportunities there. In their family, Felicity's partner had the predominant economic responsibility for the family unit. They had moved to Sweden for his career opportunities, and it seemed he had made strong roots in the country, now running his own business. Felicity, on the other hand, who lacked higher education, struggled to find employment and continued to focus on returning home. Her child's educational trajectory was the way to instigate this in her family. She had not placed her child in "queues" to schools and believed her child should begin their education in her home country at the same time as other children. Her child's educational path placed a time limit on how long she was willing to stay in Sweden, and at the time of her interview, she had already made plans to leave with her partner to follow when his business ventures allowed.

The possibility of breaking the patterns of migration in this manner can be attributed to the global recognition of Felicity's country of origin and the ongoing imbalances regarding each parent's social positions outside of the family. This necessitated a renegotiation of the family identity, shifting away from their previous international identity in Sweden, which Felicity largely led as the non-Swedish member of the family. With her child reaching the age of starting school and requiring less intensive care, the dynamics within the family were further altered. Her role as the mother, with the primary responsibility for her child, shaped by both gendered structures and the limitations she faced in the Swedish labour market, empowered her to leverage the globally renowned education sys-

tem as a point of negotiation. She claimed that the education their child would receive would be of higher quality, making it the clear choice for their family project of providing their child with educational advantages. Her story underscores the influence that mothers wield in negotiations over their children's lives, which can, at times, diverge from the dynamics shaped by social positions held outside of the family unit.

## Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, the spotlight has been placed on privileged migrant families, particularly those comprised of highly skilled employment migrants. Specifically, the chapter has examined the choice of international preschool as embedded within the broader lifestyles and practices of these “international” families, loosely identifiable as belonging to a group such as the GMC. Whilst utilising constructions of such groups as a point of departure, the chapter has attempted to elucidate the breadth of diversity among these mobile families in the interviews. It highlights the nuanced reality that the assumption of constant transnational mobility amongst these families<sup>416</sup> is complicated by the presence of young children within these families. Having young children becomes a situation where privileged migrants can turn their attention to settling down in advantageous countries, such as Sweden,<sup>417</sup> altering the ways they perceive investments in national spheres. By conceptualising these families as existing within a “continuum of emplacement”,<sup>418</sup> the chapter provides a lens through which to comprehend how families navigate migration as a collective unit and as individual members at various life stages.

Mobility was shown to afford these families certain privileges. However, this advantage did not uniformly translate into shared benefits for both parents in a family. Gender emerged as a significant factor for these families, impacting not only their preschool choices, a shared aspect among all interviewed families, but also shaping gendered dynamics within their mobility. Mothers commonly took the lead in selecting international preschools, a role influenced by their primary caregiving responsibilities for young children. Additionally, this parental responsibility was culturally perceived as belonging predominantly to the mother's domain. Moreover, the gender composition of the interviewees further accentuated this trend, with the majority of non-Swedes being mothers. Thus, gendered structures not only influence preschool decisions but also play a pivotal role in shaping broader mobility patterns and parental roles within families.

The chapter examined distinctions between families where neither parent is Swedish and those where one parent is Swedish while the other is not. This particular distinction, often overlooked in studies concerning mobile middle classes or groups

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<sup>416</sup> Yemini et al., ‘Mobile Nationalism’.

<sup>417</sup> Weiss, ‘The Transnationalization of Social Inequality’.

<sup>418</sup> Ryan and Mulholland, ‘Trading Places’, 598.

like the GMC,<sup>419</sup> takes centre stage in the analysis. By widening the perspective on mobile families to incorporate their national backgrounds, the notions of being abroad or being home gain new meaning. These “international” families, who in the Swedish context became more “national”, managed the renegotiation of their family identity, in which international preschools were integral.

As the title of this chapter implies, parents were following the leader. However, they often inhabited distinct spheres. Those occupying higher occupational positions, typically fathers, emerged as the primary catalysts for the family’s “international” lifestyle by leading their mobility endeavours, even if it is mothers who are “international” in the Swedish context. Conversely, mothers tend to lead within the domain of their children and family life. This structural arrangement becomes notably intricate when parents originate from different national backgrounds. Thus, while educational choices can be viewed as rooted in the family unit, each parent assumes a distinct role, and preschool choice holds significance for the parents in divergent ways.

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<sup>419</sup> Adams and Agbenyega, ‘Futurescaping’; Beech et al., “‘Cosmopolitan Start-up’ Capital”; Yemini and Maxwell, ‘De-Coupling or Remaining Closely Coupled to “Home”’.

## Conclusions

In this concluding chapter, the study's results are summarised, discussed, and concluded. The main results from each empirical chapter are presented chronologically, along with their contribution to the existing literature. Subsequently, the chapter finishes with some concluding remarks. First, the chapter returns to the study's points of departure and describes the approach employed.

### Returning to the Points of Departure

The study departed from the recognition that the expansion of international education represents a phenomenon of global significance characterised by underlying social structures. Initially confined to elite cross-border families, this educational option has expanded and become increasingly integrated into the practices of middle-class families. As privileged migration opportunities extended to this demographic and local educational markets evolved to include international schools, there has been a notable shift of mobile and local middle-class families utilising international schools. The growing recognition of international assets has spurred this transformation.<sup>420</sup> This thesis situated international preschools, an educational level joining the domain of international education, as a global but also inherently local affair. In light of this, the study aimed to understand the relationship between international preschools and the families who choose them for their young children in Stockholm, Sweden.

Two sets of interrelated research questions were posed. The first concerned the objective structures surrounding international preschools, asking: what characterises international preschools' social recruitment when considering class hierarchies and social differences between all families in the preschool landscape of Stockholm? How does international preschool recruitment compare to that of preschools without international orientations? And how do their particular language offers relate to the social structures in this landscape? The second set was related to families' encounters with these social structures, asking: How do families with different social, economic, and cultural assets experience and navigate

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<sup>420</sup> Julia Resnik, 'The Denationalization of Education and the Expansion of the International Baccalaureate', *Comparative Education Review* 56, no. 2 (2012): 248–69.

the social structures of the preschool landscape? In what ways do families negotiate between “national” and “international” considerations when selecting international preschools, and how do their class and migration backgrounds influence these decisions? And what role do family dynamics, such as language composition, nationalities, and gender, play in shaping these choices?

The focus on preschool education within the study allowed for an exploration of various perspectives unique to this level of international education. Children’s young age provided an opportunity to investigate how families navigate the pursuit of transnational experiences and assets when their children are infants and toddlers, a period when the possession and possibilities for activating their worth are still unclear. Moreover, considering that international schools are often regarded as high-quality, academically-focused institutions,<sup>421</sup> redirecting the focus to the preschool level – defined by its unique education and care philosophy – offered an avenue to delve into the intersection of internationality and the educational framework within preschools. The distinct perceptions regarding phases of childhood and learning are interrelated here, with the preschool child conceived as unique from the school-aged child. Furthermore, the focus on preschool brought parenting and parenting cultures to the forefront, situating preschool choice as a parenting practice embedded within cultural norms.<sup>422</sup>

Literature concerning international education captures the influence of globalisation on families and their educational choices for their children. A pertinent theme is the transnationalisation of families in the sense that families are more often raising their children in foreign countries or orientating them towards international futures. Although these aspects were intrinsic to this study, a broader perspective was adopted, emphasising that further forms of transnationalisation of families are increasingly commonplace in contemporary society due to the processes of globalisation.

Theoretically, the study has positioned itself within a Bourdieusian perspective, drawing upon the relational notions of institutions gaining significance in relation to others, the relevance of social class in studies of international education and educational choice, and exploring families as composed of parents possessing potentially divergent social characteristics and resources. It has studied international preschools within a broader but local context, namely the preschool landscape, conceived as a socially structured educational market where families’ values and beliefs are brought to the forefront.

The study adopted a mixed methods approach. The first set of research questions was addressed by quantitatively examining the social recruitment to international preschools, considering class (as measured through education and income level) and distinctions between social fractions and groups (concerning educational track and migration). Specifically, the study explored differences

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<sup>421</sup> Alfaraidy, ‘Factors Influencing Saudi Parents’ Choice of International Schools in Saudi Arabia’; Weenink, ‘Cosmopolitanism as a Form of Capital’.

<sup>422</sup> E.g. Holloway, ‘Local Childcare Cultures’; Vincent and Ball, *Childcare, Choice and Class Practices*.

among families regarding their constellation of social characteristics and species of capital. Within this mixed methods approach, the statistical analyses shed light on the social structures shaping educational choices among families, and the qualitative component, which addressed the second set of research questions, explored how families, the majority of whom hailed from middle-class migrant backgrounds, experienced and navigated the preschool landscape. In the statistical analyses, the outcomes of family choices were studied, whilst the interviews examined families' decision-making processes, situating them within broader social structures and the dynamics among family members.

## Preschool Choices in a Socially Structured Landscape

The first empirical chapter analysed the social recruitment to international preschools to answer the first set of research questions and reveal the objective structures of the localised preschool landscape where international preschools operate. The primary approach employed involved creating a social space of families using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA). The analysis included all unique families engaging with preschools in the geographic area studied between 2016 and 2020. This population was transformed through the MCA into a multidimensional social space that captured the patterns in families' social characteristics and capital constellations. The structure of this space became the framework for comparing the social recruitment of international and non-international preschools, along with differences between the languages offered by international preschools.

The chapter showed the primary oppositions between families within this space in relation to their studied social characteristics, including those pertaining to general forms of power and advantages, such as economic capital. Moreover, it captured symbolic differences, such as educational investments, and the interplay between migration and the possession of these social characteristics. The dominant oppositions between families emerged as the most salient structures. Firstly, there existed an opposition between resource-rich rooted Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants. Recent migrants were found to occupy weaker positions in terms of possessing dominant species of capital, while Swedish families, typically middle class, were in possession of high levels of educational and economic capital. The second most dominant opposition was between highly educated public-sector families and affluent private-sector families. This opposition captured distinctions within the middle classes, where investments in different spheres forged their respective distinctions. Lastly, the third and final opposition identified was between the established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. Again, this opposition was found within the middle classes.

The main results of the chapter stem from the analysis of the location of preschools within these social structures, which represent the central point for family recruitment. The findings highlighted that international preschools do not solely

cater to one social group or fraction, nor are they limited to serving specific demographic segments. This result aligns with the notion that marketisation processes within publicly funded education systems have extended access to international education and transnational assets to new social groups, even at the preschool level.<sup>423</sup> However, it also raises questions regarding the global discourses of legitimacy surrounding forms of international education. These preschools can be likened to the so-called non-traditional schools, which are perceived as niche fillers established to meet the demands of aspirational local families desiring Western and English-speaking education.<sup>424</sup> In the Swedish preschool context, they were shown to cater to a more diverse group. As a Western country with a significant focus on the English language within the general internationalisation of schools, international preschool institutions assume unique meaning. They are attended by both foreign and Swedish families with diverse migration histories, and, as the interviews evidenced, aspirations. As such, the dominant typologies can be seen to obscure the complexities of international education in specific national contexts.

These preschools did not occupy a distinctly elite position per se, nor did they demonstrate that particular social groups exclusively value internationality. Each institution had its own recruitment demographic, and while many held similar positions, they were distributed throughout the space, indicating that diverse families engage with international preschool education. Moreover, each international preschool was located close to other non-international preschools, illustrating that socially similar families also enrolled at non-international preschools. Although there were some patterns, this finding illustrated that the choice of international preschool is influenced by more complex dynamics, whether related to geographic distribution, specific socio-geographic parenting cultures, or the negotiation of social resources and choices within families themselves.

The analysis then explored the distribution of preschools with different language profiles in this space. This illuminated several aspects. Somali preschools occupied distinct positions in the space, typically associated with recent migrant families (or more established migrants regarding the first and third oppositions) possessing lower educational and economic capital.<sup>425</sup> While this does not entirely encapsulate their social recruitment, their positions within the prevailing social structures shed light on these preschools' symbolic positions, their form of internationality, and the social characteristics of the families that attend them. This form of internationality that the Somali preschools possess was shown to be unrecognised by the Swedish middle class, who preferred other language-profiled international preschools. As such, it emerged that the symbolic worth of Somali-speaking international preschools was limited to a certain area of the social space.

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<sup>423</sup> See Hayden and Thompon's typology and the posed social recruitment to these different forms of international education institutions Hayden and Thompon, 'International Schools: Antecedents, Current Issues and Metaphors for the Future'.

<sup>424</sup> Hayden and Thompon, 7; Poole, 'Decoupling Chinese Internationalised Schools from Normative Constructions of the International School'.

<sup>425</sup> With the main opposition most relevant for highlighting their social recruitment.



English-speaking international preschools, on the other hand, exhibited a different pattern. Although some institutions held positions that suggested their association with resource-weak families and recent migration, other institutions were positioned on the opposite side of the space. This indicates that English holds symbolic value for a wide range of families, even if they may not necessarily attend the same preschool (presumably influenced by the geographical distribution of these preschools). English-speaking international preschools emerged as a meeting point for families in the different fractions of the middle classes, serving both affluent private-sector families and highly educated public-sector families. English-speaking international preschools, while having relatively diverse recruitment, could be seen as associated with migration. Children with foreign backgrounds and families where parents had migrated, were overrepresented in these preschools.

Even those that were closer to the pole of Swedish families on the first opposition were more associated with the area of the space characterised by natural scientists with migrant backgrounds (not recent) at the intersection of the first and the third opposition. This finding highlighted that their positions on the first opposition related more to their educational and economic resources than their Swedish or migrant backgrounds. The positions of English-speaking international preschools with weak profiles supported this notion. These preschools were predominantly located towards the pole of Swedish families, albeit often found mostly in the centre of the space where families do not exhibit the distinctions captured in the space. While the bilingual English preschools were more associated with migrant families, those with weak English profiles tended to be characterised less by families with migration backgrounds and more so by Swedish backgrounds.

The languages of Estonian, French, German, Greek, and Spanish were also studied. The location of the one Spanish and one Estonian preschools provided little possibility for sociological interpretation; their recruitment was not particularly distinct in relation to the social structures unveiled. The two Greek preschools had distinct positions from one another; one held a location that did not allow much interpretation, but the other tended to be more associated with recent migrant families with lower educational and economic capital, which was consistent throughout the other oppositions. The German preschool, positioned towards the centre of the space, had little relevance to the affluent private sector or highly educated public sector families, presumably capturing both of these groups. However, it was positioned towards areas of stronger resources and slightly towards established migrant families, albeit weakly in both cases. Lastly, the French preschools were also located towards the middle of the space, slightly more towards the pole of affluent private sector families. When considering the intersection of the natural scientists and the humanities and social scientists, where migration was associated with the natural scientists, these preschools were located closer to this area of the space.

The primary insights gleaned from this chapter underscored the significance of the language offerings of international preschools in shaping their social re-

recruitment dynamics, albeit with varying degrees of impact. While certain languages possess limited symbolic value, others attract a broader demographic. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the primary social distinctions between families, such as those based on private sector versus public sector affiliations, primarily pertain to the broader familial landscape. When translated to the context of international preschool choice, these structures do not necessarily indicate that such groups encounter the preschool landscape in divergent ways. Instead, these families probably converge within international preschools.

## Families' Constructions of National and International

In Chapter Six, the thesis shifted its focus to the interviews conducted with parents of children attending international preschools, encompassing English, French, and Somali language profiles. The analysis was built on 36 interviews with primarily mothers, and in some cases fathers or both parents together. These families were also projected into the social space framework established in Chapter Five, which showed their predominantly middle-class positions. The analysis collectively examined families' positions within this space, alongside their narratives, viewpoints, and portrayals of family life. This encompassed details regarding the social characteristics of individual parents. Chapter Six expanded upon Chapter Five, which revealed that while certain international preschools held somewhat unique positions relative to each other, other non-international preschools were located in comparable areas of the space. Therefore, this chapter delved into families' navigation of the broader preschool landscape, while acknowledging that they were still operating within a specific social realm. The chapter is the first of three, addressing the second set of research questions. It sheds light on how families experience and navigate the social structures in the preschool landscape (as revealed in Chapter Five), how they negotiate notions of "national" and "international", and how their social characteristics as a family unit, coupled with internal family dynamics, shape their choices.

Two primary themes emerged in this chapter: one focused on the educational content of preschools, while the other revolved around Swedish culture, which was perceived to extend into preschools. Families navigated both themes by categorising certain aspects as either "national", "Swedish", or "international". Consequently, they evaluated the suitability of preschools, whether non-international or international, as well as the specific form of internationality, based on how these categories resonated with their own family dynamics and identities. Central to this chapter was the recognition that the convergence of social class and specific forms of internationality often enables middle-class families with foreign backgrounds to sidestep the necessity to root themselves in national educational spheres. This phenomenon was particularly evident among those who opted for English or French-speaking international preschools. Their socio-economic backgrounds, coupled with their possession of specific transna-

tional resources, afforded them the luxury of bypassing national investments in Sweden – a privilege not readily available to less privileged migrant groups.

The educational content of preschools was found to be especially pertinent within the Swedish context, given the country's unitary preschool system with a strong *educare* philosophy. Some families could avoid this Swedish style of preschool education by attending fee-charging international preschools. However, this possibility was not necessarily associated with families' possession of greater economic resources compared to other interviewed families. Instead, the opportunity stemmed from their employment conditions; their specific positions in international companies and organisations facilitated their access to such institutions. Here, it was demonstrated that whether families embraced such opportunities was correlated with their experiences of their positions within national or international spheres; it was not universally accepted among families to seize such offers. It was evident that individuals with stronger affiliations to the private sector were more inclined towards this type of education, whereas public sector workers, even when operating within international spheres, felt less at ease in such environments.<sup>426</sup> This observation served as an illustration of divergent dispositions amongst social fractions intersecting with internationality.

Even among families navigating the publicly funded system, enrolling their children in international preschools was viewed as a means to diverge from more traditional Swedish-style education. This perspective prevailed despite these institutions following the Swedish curriculum and adhering to preschool regulations. Two distinct logics emerged: one concerning the avoidance of Swedish education and the other regarding continued investment in certain spheres. Parents from English-speaking countries who enrolled their children in English-speaking international preschools invested in their home countries and their sense of being in an international sphere simultaneously. The structure and educational ethos of these international preschools aligned with that of their home countries. Conversely, for those not originating from Anglophone countries, the choice of this education concerned their desire to engage in international spheres. This finding aligns with previous literature that shows that families hailing from Anglophone countries tend to place lower value on the international orientation of international schools than those hailing from non-English-speaking countries.<sup>427</sup> The chapter also demonstrated that it was not solely the language but also the structured educational approach similar to that of Anglophone countries that held significance.

This perception did not apply universally to all international preschools. Somali preschools, as perceived by attending parents, were regarded as no different from other preschools. They often emphasised their lack of distinctiveness,

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<sup>426</sup> This is furthered in relation to enrolment patterns of the cultural and economic fractions of internationally mobile middle class families to international schools. Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme, 'Struggling with Capital'.

<sup>427</sup> Mackenzie, Hayden, and Thompson, 'Parental Priorities in the Selection of International Schools', 309.

plausibly to avoid standing out conspicuously from Swedish preschools, which could carry negative connotations for this social group. French preschools, particularly those affiliated with fee-charging international schools, were not considered to offer a more academically rigorous style of education solely by virtue of their international association. Instead, these preschools provided a more nationally oriented French education, typically preferred to the less structured environments found in Swedish preschools, especially when families planned for routes back to French-speaking countries.

Consequently, parents utilised their associations with other national contexts or international spheres as points of comparison for Swedish education. When they considered their previous contexts to hold more significant symbolic and educational value, they chose international preschools. As they navigated the local market, their perspectives, shaped by experiences in other contexts, influenced their expectations and beliefs regarding the optimal education for their young child. Thus, the symbolic value of national and international spheres emerged prominently within the local preschool market.

The theme of Swedish culture was intricately linked to notions of education, with particular nuances emerging, especially among non-Swedish families navigating the publicly funded sector. A common trait among these families was their consideration of international and non-international preschools. This was partly attributed to the restricted availability of international preschools and the need to apply to multiple settings. Interactions with Swedes influenced their perceptions of whether they aligned more closely with Swedes or identified as part of an international group.

Particular child-rearing styles and cultural attributes, including language usage, were often attributed by non-Swedes to be reflective of Swedish norms and were perceived to be mirrored in preschool environments. When these norms clashed with the values and cultures of these parents, a preference for internationally-orientated preschools was reinforced. Parents sometimes discovered that their practices, including language use, were not acknowledged in Swedish social settings, such as visits to potential non-international preschools. In instances where these environments failed to accommodate them, parents felt excluded, rendering them more akin to less privileged migrant groups rather than privileged migrants.

Essentially, the chapter suggested that parents' attempts to activate their symbolic capital, such as their language or transnational assets, were not universally acknowledged. Non-international preschools were viewed as environments where this symbolic currency held little value. Thus, they were to be avoided, with preference given to arenas where their assets were recognised. Those without the nationally symbolic Swedish language were found to be in a disadvantaged position when it came to the structures of the preschool market and their options within it. Consequently, their sense of belonging was shaped by their ability to have their symbolic assets recognised, a process that extended to families where one parent was Swedish and the other was not. These families engaged in a process of seeking out environments that valued both parents' cultural backgrounds

and associated assets. International preschools were evaluated on their ability to recognise both aspects of their family, encompassing both the international and Swedish sides, rather than solely focusing on one or the other. Parents actively moulded their identities, sense of belonging, and perceptions of preschool suitability based on their experiences and successes in being recognised as part of national and international spheres. While acknowledging the dominance of Swedish culture, if unable to integrate into these arenas, parents sought alternative environments to attain recognition and status.

## Negotiating Linguistic Development

Chapter Seven was dedicated to language, in particular multilingualism. In commonality with Chapter Six, the analysis was predominantly based on the 36 interviews with parents and contributed to answering the second set of research questions that concerned how families navigated the social structures of the preschool landscapes, and the role of their social characteristics and family dynamics within this. Chapter Seven explored the decision-making process of families regarding international preschools within the context of their efforts to invest in their children's multilingualism. The chapter adopted a broad definition of multilingualism, acknowledging the diversity within this category. However, it placed particular emphasis on families where parents spoke different native languages to one another. Moreover, the chapter illustrated that the study of international preschools, unlike schools, unveils a unique linguistic dynamic.

Enrolling children in international preschools offering a language different from their home language was perceived to provide linguistic advantages at an early age; however, it could also jeopardise families' assumed natural transmission of one of their most vital symbolic resources – their native language. This phenomenon was not confined to a specific linguistic dynamic within families; it was evident among Swedish and non-Swedish families.

A further aspect specific to the focus on international preschools was the acknowledgement of preschool as the initial phase in educational pathways. For families aiming for nationally recognised educational paths, especially within non-international schools known for their strong reputation and academic excellence, the window of opportunity to expose their children to languages was perceived as the preschool years. This viewpoint was commonly held by families with one or two Swedish parents, particularly those opting for English international preschools. Conversely, other families, typically non-Swedish parents who had limited Swedish-specific resources such as language proficiency, viewed non-international routes in Sweden as unfeasible. Instead, they planned for educational trajectories within international schools in the country, with preschool as the initial step in paving the way for their children's educational journey. Additionally, families contemplating potential moves to other countries

saw enrolling their children in English (and sometimes French) preschools as a strategy to transition into education abroad.

For families attending the French international preschool affiliated with the fee-charging international school, there was a necessity to invest in French language proficiency during preschool years to secure admission due to language tests. Despite having these languages spoken at home, families were aware that their children might be at a disadvantage compared to those with only one home language. In this case, bilingualism was perceived as potentially hindering full mastery of a language, especially for young children at the outset of their linguistic journey.

Somali-speaking families wishing to invest in Somali-speaking education could only find such institutions during preschool years. This absence of a continued educational pathway for Somali speakers was linked to the perceived necessity for their children's proficient mastery of Swedish, a requirement not consistently applicable to other families interviewed. The perceived necessity for particular languages in the preschool years was mirrored in the examination of commuting patterns among families. Those opting for French preschools frequently embarked on longer commutes, whereas Somali preschools tended to draw from more geographically constrained areas. Essentially, the chapter elucidates how families navigated the preschool market in consideration of later educational trajectories for their children. It underscores the importance of the specific needs associated with these trajectories, which in turn manifest in their preschool choices. Moreover, it suggests that, in the absence of other pragmatic limitations, due to Sweden's strongly regulated system, for these middle-class families, the only pragmatic consideration they tended to face was commuting times. Those with the resources could opt for preschools further away, basing their choices on their perceptions of quality, which often amounted to their international orientation.<sup>428</sup>

Chapter Seven also addressed two constellations of family multilingualism among these middle-class families. One pertains to situations where parents have different native languages. The other involves a dynamic where one parent is Swedish-speaking, which holds particular significance within the Swedish context. For families with different native languages, raising young children to acquire at least two languages proved to be a challenging process, particularly during the pivotal early stages of language acquisition in the first few years of preschool. Having previously established their language practices and formed their family identity around them, these families adjusted their practices after the birth of their children. The analysis indicates that this alteration became a focal point for potential conflict in the family's efforts to raise a multilingual child, as several families observed their young children showing a preference for one par-

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<sup>428</sup> cf. Chen and Alice, whose study of ECEC landscape illustrated the three phases of choice process. With the only pragmatic consideration for families in this thesis being preschools' distance from their home, these middle class families were able to search across the city when looking for their particular concept of quality preschools. Chen and Bradbury, 'Parental Choice of Childcare in England'.

ent's language. Moreover, while children may initially appear to shape family dynamics merely through their presence, they also possess agency in influencing these dynamics. Although it may be challenging to argue that babies wield direct power, as children develop language skills, it becomes evident that they hold greater potential for shaping their families.<sup>429</sup>

The gender structure within families emerged as relevant to their preschool choices and family language practices. Children often preferred their Mother's native languages at this stage, which could cause issues in families attempting to transmit both languages simultaneously. Such findings are apparent within the literature concerning multilingual parenting.<sup>430</sup> However, the chapter highlighted the role that preschool played in families' efforts to navigate and address linguistic imbalances. Negotiations within families centred around the choice of preschool to support the weaker language or the repercussions of their preschool choice on these linguistic imbalances. This issue was demonstrated to be a source of contention as responsibility for linguistic imbalances was attributed to the dominance of the mother's tongue, coupled with their predominant role in selecting preschool. Mothers attributed the dominance of their mother tongue to their increased efforts in transmitting their language and caring for their children. Furthermore, in families where fathers were Swedish speakers, the mother tongue's dominance was justified because they resided in Sweden, where the community language favoured the father. However, mothers' abilities to negotiate these dynamics depended on their own investment in their children mastering Swedish. Those planning to stay in the country were more concerned about the Swedish language than those with plans in other national contexts.

Essentially, the chapter highlights that while the linguistic focus of international preschools influences parents' decisions, these institutions do not guarantee the effortless transmission of linguistic advantages. Families whose languages are represented in international preschools have a distinct advantage compared to other migrant groups: they can leverage these preschools as a tool for language transmission. This underscores the emergence of using preschools in multilingual projects as a novel development in how families navigate multilingualism. For languages available in international preschools, the opportunities provided to families to achieve their specific language goals introduce a new dynamic to the lives of multilingual families, albeit limited to those speaking the languages offered.

## Situating Preschool Choice in Migration Dynamics

Chapter Eight, the final empirical chapter, delved into families categorised as privileged employment migrants, often associated with designations like Global

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<sup>429</sup> For example, Lignier illustrates young children's linguistic advantage functioning as a form of control Lignier, 'Symbolic Power for Beginners'.

<sup>430</sup> Okita, *Invisible Work*, 137–48.

Middle Class (GMC). The chapter explored the dynamics within these families, particularly gender. The chapter answers the second set of research questions, concerning families' processes of choosing preschool, and the role of family dynamics and migration backgrounds in these choices. In particular, the chapter situated preschool choice within the lives of parents, exploring the influence of their migration histories and constellations of assets on how they organised family life and, consequently, made preschool choices. It illustrated how the already gendered process of raising young children was heightened within families experiencing privileged migration. This gendered pattern significantly influenced how families made choices regarding preschool for their children, a responsibility that typically fell within the domain of mothers.

The chapter illustrated how the social positions that parents held outside of their families reproduced the structures within their families. It explored families where both parents were not Swedish and those where only one parent was Swedish. Many of the patterns regarding migration's impact on family dynamics were apparent across these groups. Primarily, among the interviewees fitting the definition of privileged employment-facilitated migration, the fathers' occupations often drove their cross-border mobility. This tendency tended to reinforce their positions outside the family, as fathers continued investing in their careers. At the same time, mothers faced more challenging conditions in their transitions to new national labour markets. The significance of employment and belonging to specific occupational fields became evident, as did the timing within individuals' careers when mobility occurred.

Accompanying parents found it easier to establish themselves in their new national contexts, particularly in Sweden, when they worked within private sector occupations in professions not tied to national certification nor required Swedish. Industries like technology, business, and finance appeared more accessible to these individuals. Similarly, certain public sector professions, such as academia, were also areas where mobile individuals had better luck gaining access. However, professions within the public sector that demanded proficiency in Swedish or required national certification, such as health and social care, posed more significant challenges and demanded substantial investments to access. Many individuals were unwilling to make such investments, especially when their stays were considered temporary. Parents' successes and limitations in establishing themselves in Sweden had consequences for how they determined the best educational approach for their children.

The chapter also highlighted the relevance of the career progression of these accompanying parents. Despite being mobile in the past, many families had spent periods in countries where the accompanying parent established their careers, desiring to return to their careers after having children. No longer solely focused on caring for dependent children, they sought to re-enter the labour market but faced challenges caused by their relocation. While they may have previously been comfortable with starting anew in different countries, enjoying mobility and acquiring international resources through social interactions, once they had



established their careers, these international assets held less value unless they added to their already valuable occupational position. For many of these accompanying parents, typically mothers, there was a need and desire to invest in their partners' careers for the advantages it provided to the family as a whole, both economically and symbolically. Their role within the family as the primary carer, already influenced by gender norms, became solidified. However, the chapter highlights that social positions alone were insufficient to organise family dynamics when it came to raising children. Even mothers who had led mobility tended to take on the primary responsibility for their young children, highlighting the prevalence of gendered norms in these situations.

When these mobile families comprised a parent who was Swedish, a new dynamic emerged within their imbalances. The parents leading the mobility, often the holders of certain transnational assets, were suddenly in a situation where they also had access to secure national resources, whether it be language proficiency, cultural similarity, or social and occupational networks that could be easily converted into new species of capital. Once again, the chapter underscores the gender imbalance that persists in families. Mothers who were not Swedish found themselves renegotiating their identities within their once international families, now leaning towards becoming more Swedish. Despite their disadvantage in the Swedish context, they took on the predominant role in choosing preschools for their children, suggesting the strongly gendered dynamic of preschool choice perpetuates the social structures of families. They navigated their way through the bureaucratic system, attempting to leverage their often deemed insufficient cultural assets. "International" social circles, whether these be "expat" parenting groups or international preschools, functioned as valuable resources for these mothers and families as a whole. The existence of such middle-class social networks that recognised the worth of international assets and experiences allowed mothers and families less able to secure themselves in local Swedish groups to swiftly establish themselves in a national context with socially similar counterparts. Thus, parents' choices of international preschools were embedded within their experiences and migration histories. Their ability to access socially similar networks, where they were not disadvantaged by their lack of Swedish, solidified their international paths even in the local Swedish context.

## Concluding Remarks

This thesis explored international preschools within a wider preschool landscape to understand their place within social hierarchies and divisions and to discern the meanings given to "international" by families embedded, to varying degrees, within this local context. The results pointed towards international preschools, regardless of language profile, not being of great importance to the Swedish middle classes, at least not on a general level. While members of the Swedish middle class still attended these preschools, particularly those offering English,

French, or German, they did not serve as clear strategies for social distinction or advantage in this context. Other studies of international preschools have associated these institutions with local middle-class families seeking social advantage through early investments in transnational assets; this appears to be less the case in the Swedish context. A possible deduction for this phenomenon may be related to the specifics of the local preschool landscapes. In contexts where the local middle class is overrepresented, there are often associated costs with attending international preschools.<sup>431</sup> Not only does this limit access to those with the economic means, but it also bestows prestige upon these exclusive institutions. This elevates the symbolic value of acquiring transnational assets at a young age. In contrast, in Sweden, where there are no price differences between publicly funded preschools, regardless of whether they have an international profile, these international institutions provide a less certain path to social advantage for the domestic middle classes.

For those families already in possession of transnational assets, in the sense of having resided in other countries or hailing from foreign countries, these preschools emerged as integral to the familial project of raising their children in Sweden. This can be seen as these families attempting to continue investing in their social advantage accumulated through mobility while counteracting their disadvantages in their new national context. A similar logic is posed regarding families' choice of international schools, with this disadvantage often related to children's linguistic and cultural deficiencies in new national contexts.<sup>432</sup> For the families in this thesis, the disadvantages that parents – typically mothers – were attempting to sidestep concerned their own rather than those of their preschool-aged children.

Mothers took a prominent position in this thesis primarily because of their overrepresentation in the interview study. They frequently emerged as the primary drivers of preschool selection, reflecting a common practice in early childhood education and care choices.<sup>433</sup> Educational decisions are often studied in relation to families as a unit,<sup>434</sup> or just mothers.<sup>435</sup> This thesis emphasises that mothers, while pivotal in the choices for their young children, approach this responsibility through maternal and familial perspectives. They endeavour to raise their children per both parents' values and aspirations while preserving their individual beliefs and viewpoints. However, this process was rife with negotia-

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<sup>431</sup> E.g. Gerhards, Hans, and Carlson, *Social Class and Transnational Human Capital*, 124–27; Becker-Cavallin and Knoll, 'Establishing Multiple Languages in Early Childhood. Heritage Languages and Language Hierarchies in German-English Daycare Centers in Switzerland.'; Koh and Ziqi, "'Start-up' Capital'; Prošić-Santovac and Radović, 'Children's vs. Teachers' and Parents' Agency'.

<sup>432</sup> E.g. Wadding, Bertilsson, and Palme, 'Struggling with Capital', 708.

<sup>433</sup> Vincent, Braun, and Ball, 'Local Links, Local Knowledge'.

<sup>434</sup> E.g. Ball, Bowe, and Gewirtz, 'Circuits of Schooling'.

<sup>435</sup> Simon Duncan et al., 'Mothers and Child Care: Policies, Values and Theories', *Children & Society* 18, no. 4 (2004): 254–65; Daniela Del Boca, Marilena Locatelli, and Daniela Vuri, 'Child-Care Choices by Working Mothers: The Case of Italy', *Review of Economics of the Household* 3, no. 4 (2005): 453–77; Holloway, 'Local Childcare Cultures'.

tions and ambivalence, especially when there were imbalances regarding the worth or dominance of mothers' and fathers' assets in their national context.

The parental responsibility of choosing the right preschool is framed by the specificities of their local context.<sup>436</sup> For these families, the opportunities for international education, facilitated by the offerings of the preschool market, led them to consider not only the quality of preschools but also the languages and cultures offered in these settings. The preschool landscape intersected with families' perspectives on cultures and languages, and their efforts to transmit multilingualism to their children. International preschools emerged as a symbol of good parenting among multilingual families. For many, fulfilling this moral obligation meant commuting long distances to access the most suitable linguistic and educational environments for their children.

Families' inclination to commute suggested novel dimensions of the socio-geographic framing of preschool choices; their social-geographic contexts were not tied to their particular city areas.<sup>437</sup> Despite their immersion in international spheres, these families conducted their daily lives within national boundaries and attempted to interact with the socio-geographically rooted mothering ideologies. However, their encounters with prevailing parenting cultures and ideologies in Sweden influenced their interactions with the preschool market. When faced with conflicting parenting and early childhood norms in Sweden, these mothers did not yield to these cultural pressures as some migrant groups are posed.<sup>438</sup> Instead, they found solidarity with others living in similar positions and forged their "international" identities, even accessing publicly funded preschools that validated the worth of their parenting ideologies and upbringing styles.

Despite possessing similar class positions to the Swedish parents they met, their cultural assets sometimes diverged. Parents identified with parenting and ECEC cultures from other countries or international spheres, which were not necessarily tied to specific areas within the city. Consequently, they formed somewhat parallel socio-geographic cultures, actively seeking preschools across the city, influenced by their interactions with so-called "expat" groups or migrants from other national contexts. They circumvented the traditionally rooted socio-geographic cultures, and forged their own paths. This process may potentially occur for other families making distinct choices or possessing unique combinations of capital and social characteristics.

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<sup>436</sup> Karlsson, Löfdahl, and Prieto, 'Morality in Parents' Stories of Preschool Choice', 221; Holloway, 'Local Childcare Cultures'.

<sup>437</sup> cf. Holloway, 'Local Childcare Cultures'.

<sup>438</sup> E.g. Zhu, 'Learning to Become Good Mothers'.



SAMMANFATTNING:

## Att spela med det globala Familjedynamik och internationell utbildning i ett marknadiserat förskolelandskap

Utgångspunkten för denna avhandling är den rapporterade ökningen av internationella skolors popularitet, en trend som under de senaste decennierna har utvidgats även till förskoleverksamhet och barnomsorg. Vi har bevittnat en markant ökning av internationella förskolor, det vill säga förskolor som erbjuder undervisning i främmande språk och flerspråkighet, följer internationella läroplaner och betonar främjandet av internationella egenskaper hos barnen. I denna avhandling riktas fokus mot internationella förskolor och det sociala samspelet mellan dessa institutioner och de familjer som valt dessa förskolor. I likhet med internationella skolor, anses internationella förskolor vara kopplade till två aspekter av samhällets globalisering. För det första tillmäts transnationella tillgångar en allt större betydelse, exempelvis färdigheter som att tala främmande språk och odla en kosmopolitisk hållning till omvärlden. För det andra, tenderar förekomsten av transnationella familjer att öka när man ser till de som uppfostrar sina barn i främmande länder och de familjer som består av föräldrar med olika nationell bakgrund.

Avhandlingens fokus på internationella förskolor, som en del av en internationell skolgång, gjorde det möjligt att utforska nya dimensioner av internationell utbildning kopplat till barn i unga åldrar. Genom att överbygga flera olika forskningsområden, såsom, internationell utbildning, föräldrakulturer, kön, tidig flerspråkighet och förskoleval, kastar avhandlingen nytt ljus över familjers sökande efter internationella tillgångar i en period i barnens liv då det fortfarande är oklart vilket värde sådana tillgångar kan föra med sig. Genom att rikta uppmärksamheten mot förskolan, som kännetecknas av en kombinerad utbildnings- och omsorgsfilosofi (*educare*), gavs dessutom en möjlighet att undersöka skärningspunkten mellan värden och praktiker kopplade till internationalisering och det specifika pedagogiska ramverk som förskolan utgör. Studien underströk också betydelsen av föräldraskap och föräldrakulturer, vari valet av förskola framställdes som en föräldrapraktik inbäddad i kulturella normer. Genom att lyfta fram föräldraskap och kulturella dimensioner av valet av internationell utbildning, placerade studien familjerna, och dess dynamik, som analysenhet, i förgrunden. Detta tillvägagångssätt fångade hur familjernas interna sammansättning gällande kön, social klass, språk, migrationshistoria och sociala resurser påverkade deras möten med internationella förskolor i ett allt mer marknadsanpassat förskolelandskap.

Avhandlingen utgick från ett teoretiskt ramverk inspirerat av den franske sociologen Pierre Bourdieu, med den centrala utgångspunkten att institutioner får social betydelse i relation till andra och betydelsen av social klass och distinktioner i samband med internationell utbildning och utbildningsval. Avhandlingen studerar internationella förskolor i ett bredare men samtidigt lokalt sammanhang, nämligen ett geografiskt avgränsat förskolelandskap. Detta förskolelandskap betraktas som en socialt strukturerad utbildningsmarknad där familjernas värderingar och övertygelser sätts i förgrunden. Dessutom tar avhandlingen utgångspunkt i familjernas komplexitet och ser dem som sammansatta av föräldrar med potentiellt skilda sociala egenskaper och resurser. Valet av förskola uppfattas därför som intimt sammanflätat med föräldrarnas kollektiva familjeinsats. I avhandlingen erkändes också att familjens första möte med en institutionaliserad utbildningsform utgör en kritisk punkt där karaktären och riktningen för denna kollektiva strävan kan utmanas eller omförhandlas. Detta synsätt framstod som särskilt viktigt när man beaktade de olika strukturella faktorerna inom familjerna, såsom kön, sociala resurser och migrationserfarenheter.

Studien nyttjade både statistiska analyser och metoder, främsta multipel korrespondensanalys (MCA), och kvalitativa intervjuer. Den statistiska analysen undersökte den sociala rekryteringen till internationella förskolor (definierat som förskolor som erbjuder undervisning på främmande språk), inte bara med hänsyn till klass (mätt genom föräldrarnas utbildning och inkomstnivå) utan även skillnader mellan sociala fraktioner och grupper (avseende utbildningsinriktningar och migrationshistorik). Dessa analyser åskådliggjorde de objektiva sociala strukturer som formar utbildningsval bland familjer – deras konkurrens om sociala positioner och hur dessa översätts till val inom förskolelandskapet. I studien ingick även intervjuer med föräldrar till barn som går på internationella förskolor. Majoriteten av familjerna hade en medelklassbakgrund och en migrationshistorik. Denna kvalitativa komponent i studien syftade till att utforska hur familjer upplevde och navigerade detta socialt strukturerade utbildningslandskap. Familjedynamiken, som struktureras av migration, kön och sociala resurser, och hur detta relaterar till deras val för sina barn, utgjorde en central dimension av analysen. Medan den statistiska analysen studerade utfallet av föräldrars val av förskola, kontextualiserade och fördjupade intervjuerna analysen av hur bevekelsegrunderna för dessa beslut framträdde inom ramen för nämnda familjedynamik. Den statistiska analysen ligger även till grund för de mer kvalitativt orienterade avsnitten i avhandlingen och utgör en integrerad del av hela undersökningen. Intervjupersonerna införlivas i de sociala strukturer som finns i den statistiska analysen, och deras sociala positioner beaktas när deras berättelser, uppfattningar, praktiker och övertygelser analyseras.

I det första empiriska kapitlet, kapitel fem, undersöktes de objektiva strukturerna mellan alla unika familjer (föräldrar) som hade barn i förskolan i Stockholmsområdet mellan åren 2016 och 2020. Genom multipel korrespondensanalys (MCA) kartlades de viktigaste motsättningarna och skillnaderna i dessa familjers konfigurationer av sociala egenskaper i ett flerdimensionellt socialt rum. De sociala egenskaper som stu-

derades var bland annat relaterade till klasskillnader och olika typer av tillgångar, såsom ekonomiskt kapital, tillsammans med andra former av symbolisk differentiering, inklusive utbildningsinvesteringar och migrationshistoria. Den huvudsakliga motsättningen som analysen identifierade var den mellan resursstarka svenskar och resursfattiga nyanlända invandrare. Därefter identifierades en motsättning mellan högutbildade familjer i den offentliga sektorn och välbärgade familjer i den privata sektorn. Den tredje, och i analysen tydligt framträdande, motsättningen som identifierades var mellan etablerade invandrarfamiljer inom naturvetenskap och familjer med en utbildningsbakgrund inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap.

De viktigaste resultaten i kapitlet utgjordes av analyser av förskolornas placering inom dessa sociala strukturer. Resultaten visade att internationella förskolor, på ett generellt plan, inte enbart vände sig till en specifik social grupp eller klassfraktion, och de var inte heller begränsade till att betjäna specifika demografiska segment. Dessa förskolor intog inte en tydlig elitposition i förskolelandskapet och visade inte heller att specifika sociala grupper enbart värdesatte förskolors internationalitet. Varje institution hade sin egen rekryteringsdemografi, och även om många internationella förskolor intog liknande positioner, återfanns de över hela rummet av förskolor, vilket återigen indikerar att en bred uppsättning av olika familjer sökte sig till denna typ av förskolor. därutöver låg varje internationell förskola nära andra icke-internationella förskolor, vilket visade att socialt likartade familjer också rekryterades av icke-internationella förskolor.

Kapitlet undersökte också fördelningen av förskolor med olika språkprofiler i förskolerummet. De viktigaste insikterna från detta kapitel var betydelsen av internationella förskolors språkutbud när det gällde att forma deras sociala rekrytering. Vissa språk visade sig ha ett mer begränsat symboliskt värde, medan andra attraherade en bredare demografisk grupp. Somaliska förskolor förknippades främst med resurssvaga nyinvandrade familjer med lägre utbildningsnivå och ekonomiskt kapital. Deras internationella profil framstod som något oigenkännlig av den dominerande svenska medelklassen, som visserligen besökte andra språkprofilerade internationella förskolor, men sällan var inskrivna på somalisktalande förskolor. Engelskspråkiga förskolor hade däremot en bredare social attraktionskraft där vissa förskolor förknippades mer med resursstarka svenska familjer och andra med resursfattiga nyanlända invandrare. Ett antal av de engelskspråkiga förskolorna hade en rekrytering som typiskt sett bestod av invandrade med medelklassbakgrund.

De tyska och franska förskolornas rekrytering förknippades mer med resursstarka än resurssvaga familjer, men deras placering i rummet antydde en något svagare koppling till den dominerande polen av familjerna i det sociala rummet av förskolor. I båda fallen kännetecknades förskolorna mer av att rekrytera välbärgade familjer från den privata sektorn än från den offentliga sektorn. Dessutom uppvisade de en närmare koppling till etablerade invandrarfamiljer inom naturvetenskap än de inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap.

Kapitel sex utgick från intervjuer med 36 familjer (bestående av mödrar, fäder eller båda föräldrarna) vars barn gick på antingen en engelsk, fransk eller somalisk

internationell förskola. Dessa familjer projicerades in i det sociala rum som skapats i föregående kapitel, vilket visade att de hade en tydlig medelklassposition. I de kvalitativa analyserna framträdde emellertid betydelsefulla skillnader mellan dem i deras förhållningssätt till valet av förskola. Kapitlet undersökte hur familjerna navigerade i förskolelandskapet utifrån deras positioner i det sociala rummet. Familjerna hade initialt i regel undersökt möjligheten att välja icke-internationella förskolor för sina barn, främst på grund av det begränsade utbudet av internationella förskolor.

Två huvudteman framträdde i detta kapitel. Ett första tema fokuserade på förskolornas pedagogiska innehåll, medan det andra temat kretsade kring den svenska kulturen, som uppfattades sträcka sig in i förskolornas verksamhet. Familjerna hanterade båda dessa teman genom att kategorisera vissa av dessa aspekter av förskolornas verksamhet som antingen "nationella", "svenska" eller "internationella". Följaktligen utvärderade de förskolornas lämplighet, oavsett om de var icke-internationella eller internationella, samt den specifika formen av det internationella, baserat på hur dessa kategorier stämde överens med deras familjedynamik och identiteter. Centralt i detta kapitel var insikten att konvergensen mellan social klass och särskilda former av internationalitet ofta gjorde det möjligt för medelklassfamiljer med utländsk bakgrund, antingen utifrån en eller båda föräldrarna, att kringgå behovet av att rota sig i nationella utbildningsfärer och "svenska" arenor. Denna dynamik var särskilt tydlig bland dem som valde engelsk- eller franskspråkiga internationella förskolor. Deras socioekonomiska bakgrund, i kombination med deras innehav av specifika internationella tillgångar, gav dem förmånen att kringgå nationella svenska investeringar – ett privilegium som inte var lika tillgängligt för mindre privilegierade invandrargrupper.

Det pedagogiska innehållet i "svenska" förskolor jämfördes av föräldrarna med det i internationella förskolor såväl som i andra nationella sammanhang. Sveriges förskola utmärkte sig för många familjer på grund av dess enhetliga system och starka "educare"-filosofi. De som hade tillgång till ekonomiska resurser kunde helt undvika denna förskolemodell genom att gå på en av två avgiftsbelagda internationella förskolor i Stockholmsområdet. Andra valde offentligt finansierade internationella förskolor som ofta ansågs vara mer akademiskt orienterad än de "svenska" förskolorna, eller så sågs möjligheten att lära sig ett främmande språk som en konkret färdighet som inte var tillgänglig via icke-internationella förskolor. Detta perspektiv var dock inte universellt. Somaliska förskolor, så som de uppfattades av de deltagande föräldrarna, ansågs inte skilja sig från andra förskolor. Dessa föräldrar betonade istället sina förskolors likhet med icke-internationella förskolor.

Temat svensk kultur var kopplat till föreställningar om utbildning, särskilt bland dem som navigerade i det offentligt finansierade systemet. Kapitlet belyste hur familjer, särskilt de vars barn gick på en engelsk internationell förskola, brottades med sina egna föräldrakulturer medan de uppfostrade sina barn och navigerade det svenska förskolelandskapet. Interaktioner med svenskar påverkade deras val av förskola, eftersom dessa erfarenheter formade uppfattningar om huruvida de var mer lika svenskar eller identifierade sig som en del av en inter-



nationell grupp. Icke-svenska föräldrar tillskrevs ofta särskilda uppfostringsmetoder och kulturella attribut av de intervjuade föräldrarna, inklusive språkanvändning och svenska normer som uppfattades prägla förskolemiljöerna. När dessa normer krockade med föräldrarnas egna värderingar och kulturer förstärktes preferensen för internationellt orienterade förskolor. Dessutom uppträckte föräldrarna ibland att deras internationella praktiker, inklusive språkanvändning, inte erkändes i specifika svenska sociala miljöer, till exempel vid besök på potentiella icke-internationella förskolor. I de fall där dessa miljöer inte tog hänsyn till dem – vilket var en vanlig erfarenhet – kände sig föräldrarna exkluderade, vilket gjorde dem mer lika andra invandrargrupper snarare än en privilegierad internationell medelklassgrupp.

Kapitlet visade att föräldrarnas försök att aktivera sitt symboliska kapital, såsom sitt språk eller internationella tillgångar, inte erkändes av alla. Icke-internationella förskolor sågs som miljöer där denna symboliska valuta hade lågt värde. Därför skulle de undvikas och man föredrog arenor där deras tillgångar erkändes. Följaktligen formades deras känsla av tillhörighet av deras förmåga att få sina symboliska tillgångar erkända. Denna process utsträcktes till familjer där en förälder var svensk och den andra inte, vilket belyser hur föräldrar med både svensk och viss utländsk kultur, typiskt i linje med dominerande former av det internationella, sökte efter miljöer som erkände både olika kulturella bakgrunder och tillhörande tillgångar. Utifrån detta utvärderades varje internationell förskola baserat på om den erkände båda aspekterna av deras familj, den internationella och den svenska sidan, snarare än att enbart fokusera på den ena eller den andra.

I kapitel sju fokuserade analysen på språkdynamik, särskilt aspekter av flerspråkighet. I likhet med föregående kapitel låg intervjuer med föräldrar och deras positioner i det sociala rummet till grund för analysen. Dessutom ingick en statistisk analys av pendlingsmönster till internationella förskolor. I kapitlet används en bred definition av flerspråkighet för att erkänna mångfalden i begreppet, men tonvikten låg på familjer där föräldrarna hade olika modersmål. Att skriva in barn på internationella förskolor som erbjuder ett annat språk än deras hemspråk uppfattades av familjerna som att det gav språkliga fördelar i tidig ålder. Men det kunde också ses som ett hot mot familjernas förmodade naturliga överföring av en av deras viktigaste symboliska resurser – deras modersmål. Detta fenomen observerades i både svenska och icke-svenska familjer.

För familjer som strävade efter nationellt orienterade utbildningsvägar, särskilt inom icke-internationella skolor med gott rykte och vad man bedömde som hög akademisk standard, sågs internationella förskolor som en möjlighet att exponera barnen för språk utan att kompromissa med andra inlärningsmiljöstolpar. Omvänt såg familjer med begränsade svenskspecifika resurser icke-internationella vägar i Sverige som omöjliga, och planerade istället för att deras barn skulle gå i internationella skolor. Familjer som funderade på att flytta till andra länder såg dessutom inskrivningen av sina barn i engelska (och ibland franska) förskolor som en strategi för att underlätta övergången till utbildningar utomlands. Familjer som hade siktet inställt på att deras barn skulle gå på en fransk internationell skola såg det som nöd-

vändigt att investera i franska på en internationell förskola för att förbereda dem inför de antagningsprov som dessa förskolor hade. Trots att de talade dessa språk hemma såg de potentiella nackdelar för sina barn jämfört med dem som bara talade franska hemma. Tvåspråkighet uppfattades alltså som ett potentiellt hinder för fullständig språkbehärskning, särskilt för små barn. Förskolor var det primära valet för somalisktalande barn, eftersom det inte fanns några somaliska internationella skolor. Avsaknaden av en fortsatt utbildningsväg för somalisktalande var kopplad till den upplevda nödvändigheten av att deras barn skulle behärska det svenska språket, ett krav som inte på samma sätt var tillämpligt på övriga intervjuade familjer. Pendlingsmönstren återspeglade den upplevda nödvändigheten av specifika språk, med längre pendlingsavstånd för familjer som valde franska förskolor jämfört med mer geografiskt begränsade områden för somaliska förskolor.

Två konstellationer av flerspråkighet identifierades bland dessa medelklassfamiljer. Den ena involverade föräldrar med olika modersmål, medan den andra hade en svensktalande förälder, vilket var särskilt betydelsefullt i den svenska kontexten. För familjer med olika modersmål var det en utmaning att få små barn att tillägna sig minst två språk, särskilt under de tidiga stadierna av språkinläring under de första åren i förskolan. Dessa familjer, som hade etablerat sin språkpraxis innan de blev föräldrar, anpassade denna praxis när barnen föddes, och flera observerade att deras små barn utvecklade en preferens för den ena föräldrarnas språk. Mödrarnas språk tenderade att utvecklas i högre grad i detta skede bland barnen, så förskolemiljöerna spelade en avgörande roll i deras försök att navigera och hantera dessa språkliga obalanser. Förhandlingarna inom familjerna kretsade kring förskolans roll i att stödja svagare språk eller hantera språkliga obalanser. Dessa förhandlingar kunde vara en källa till konflikter, särskilt när det gäller ansvaret för språklig obalans och dominansen av modersmålet. Avslutningsvis, visade kapitlet att även om det språkliga fokuset inom internationella förskolor påverkade föräldrarnas beslut, så var det ingen garanti för att språkliga fördelar överfördes utan ansträngning. Familjer med språk som fanns representerade på internationella förskolor hade dock en fördel: de kunde använda dem som ett verktyg för språköverföring. Detta understryker att förskolor används i flerspråkiga familjeprojekt och att flerspråkiga familjers liv får en ny dynamik, om än begränsad till de språk som erbjuds av internationella förskolor.

Kapitel åtta, det sista empiriska kapitlet, fördjupade sig i familjer som kategoriserats som privilegierade arbetskraftsinvandrare och undersökte dynamiken inom dessa familjer, med särskild tonvikt på kön. Det illustrerades hur den redan könsbundna processen att uppfostra små barn förstärktes i familjer som var en del av denna privilegierade migration. Detta könsmönster påverkade i hög grad hur familjerna valde förskola för sina barn, ett ansvar som vanligtvis låg på mödrarna.

Kapitlet illustrerade hur de sociala positioner som föräldrarna hade utanför sina familjer reproducerades i deras familjedynamik. I kapitlet undersöktes familjer där båda föräldrarna inte var svenskar, samt familjer där en förälder var svensk och den andra inte. Många mönster avseende migrationens inverkan på familjedynamiken var uppenbara i dessa grupper. Bland de intervjuade som passade in

på definitionen av privilegierad migration, via någon av föräldrarnas anställning, var det främst fädernas yrken som drev deras mobilitet över gränserna. Detta tenderade att stärka deras position utanför familjen, eftersom papporna fortsatte att investera i sina karriärer. Samtidigt mötte mammorna mer utmanande situationer i sina övergångar till nya nationella arbetsmarknader. Betydelsen av anställning och tillhörighet till specifika yrkesområden blev uppenbar, liksom tidpunkten inom individernas karriärer när mobiliteten skedde.

Dessa så kallade medföljande föräldrar fann det lättare att etablera sig i sina nya nationella sammanhang när de arbetade inom den privata sektorn i yrken som inte var knutna till nationell certifiering eller behovet av kunskaper i svenska språket. Branscher som teknik, handel och finans verkade mer tillgängliga för dessa individer. På samma sätt var vissa yrken inom den offentliga sektorn, såsom den akademiska världen, också områden där mobila individer hade större möjligheter att få tillträde. Yrken inom den offentliga sektorn som krävde kunskaper i svenska eller nationell certifiering, såsom vård och omsorg, innebar dock större utmaningar och krävde betydande investeringar för att bli tillgängliga. Många individer var ovilliga att göra sådana investeringar, särskilt när deras vistelser bedömdes vara tidsbegränsade.

Kapitlet belyste också relevansen av de medföljande föräldrarnas karriärutveckling. Många familjer hade, trots att de tidigare varit mobila, tillbringat perioder i länder där den medföljande föräldern gjort karriär. De ville återvända till sina karriärer efter att ha fått barn. De var inte längre enbart inriktade på att vara hemma med sitt barn, utan försökte komma in på arbetsmarknaden igen, men ställdes inför utmaningar på grund av sin flytt till Sverige. Även om de tidigare kan ha varit bekväma med att börja om på nytt i olika länder, njuta av rörlighet och förvärva internationella resurser genom sociala interaktioner, så hade dessa internationella tillgångar, när de väl hade etablerat sin karriär, ett mindre värde om de inte bidrog till deras redan existerande yrkesposition. För många av dessa medföljande föräldrar, vanligtvis mödrar, fanns det ett behov och en önskan att investera i sina partners karriärer för de fördelar det gav för familjen som helhet, både ekonomiskt och symboliskt. Deras roll inom familjen som den primära vårdgivaren, som redan påverkats av könsnormer, kom därför att befästas. Kapitlet belyser dock att sociala positioner utanför familjen inte var tillräckliga för att organisera familjedynamiken när barn skulle uppfostras. Även mödrar som hade den drivande i familjemobiliteten tenderade fortfarande att ta på sig det primära ansvaret för sina små barn, vilket belyser förekomsten av starka könsnormer i dessa situationer.

När dessa mobila familjer även bestod av en svensk förälder uppstod en annan dynamik i obalansen mellan föräldrarna. De föräldrar som drev mobiliteten, ofta innehavare av vissa internationella tillgångar, hade tillgång till svenska resurser, oavsett om det handlade om språkkunskaper, kulturell likhet eller sociala och yrkesmässiga nätverk som kunde omvandlas till nya former av kapital. Analysen understryker än en gång obalansen mellan könen genom att mödrar som inte hade svensk bakgrund fick omförhandla sina identiteter inom ramen för vad som

förväntas av sina internationella familjer, och orienterade sig mer åt det svenska. Trots att de hanterade sin underordnade position i det svenska sammanhanget tog de på sig den ledande rollen när de valde förskola till sina barn. De navigerade sig fram genom det byråkratiska systemet och försökte dra nytta av sina kulturella tillgångar, även om dessa ofta betraktades som otillräckliga. "Internationella" sociala kretsar, oavsett om det handlade om "expat"-föräldragrupper eller internationella förskolor, fungerade som värdefulla resurser för dessa mödrar och familjer. Förekomsten av sådana sociala medelklassnätverk, som erkände värdet av internationella tillgångar och erfarenheter, gjorde det möjligt för mödrar och familjer som hade svårare att etablera sig i lokala svenska grupper att snabbt etablera sig i ett nationellt sammanhang med socialt likartade motparter.

Sammanfattningsvis har avhandlingen belyst den komplicerade dynamiken som föregås av valet av en internationell förskola inom ramen för ett lokalt förskolelandskap. Genom att undersöka samspelet mellan sociala hierarkier, föräldrakulturer och utbildningsutbud har avhandlingen visat att valet av internationella förskolor, och förskoleval i allmänhet, är inbäddat i olika typer familjeförhandlingar såväl som i samhällsliga strukturer.

Överföringen av internationella tillgångar till små barn via familjen eller internationella förskolor medförde ambivalenta ställningstaganden hos föräldrarna. Familjernas symboliska tillgångar fick sitt värde i det lokala sammanhanget genom samspelet mellan de internationella förskolornas utbud och de specifika betydelse de hade för familjer med olika nationell bakgrund, där var och en hade sin unika vision för barnens framtid. Internationella tillgångar omfattade olika element, inklusive språk och kultur, vars värde var beroende av familjernas och föräldrarnas sociala positioner, inom både nationella och internationella sfärer, deras migrationshistoria och planerade framtid. När familjerna utvärderade dessa attribut bedömdes relevansen i relation till nationella sammanhang, oavsett om det gällde att få tillgång till länder genom att behärska det dominerande språket eller delta i internationella skolor i specifika nationella sammanhang. Till skillnad från internationella skolor, där barnen ofta redan har utvecklat de nationsspecifika attribut som deras föräldrar har, var internationella tillgångar mindre viktiga för de små barn som gick i förskola.

Avhandlingen belyser således betydelsen av att studera utbildningsval, oavsett om det gäller internationellt profilerade utbildningar eller andra profiler, i deras lokala sociala sammanhang. Dessutom belyser avhandlingen barnens roll som aktiva aktörer i familjedynamiken, som påverkar föräldrarnas beslut och bidrar till omförhandling av familjespecifika föreställningar och praktiker. Sammantaget har avhandlingen bidragit till en djupare förståelse för hur familjer fattar utbildningsbeslut genom en betoning på familjedynamik (inklusive barn), samhällsstrukturer och lokala kontexter.

SUMMARY:

## Playing with the Global Family Dynamics and International Education in a Marketised Preschool Landscape

The point of departure for this thesis is the reported growth in the popularity of international schools, a trend that has extended to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in recent decades. Preschools offering foreign language and multilingual provision, following international curricula, and pledging to foster international dispositions in children are becoming more common, which suggests that we are witnessing the rise of international preschools. International preschools are the focus of this thesis, or more specifically, the social relationship between these institutions and the families that attend them. International preschools, akin to international schools, are conceived as linked to two aspects of globalisation. First, the escalating significance attached to transnational assets, including skills such as speaking foreign languages and cultivating a cosmopolitan outlook. Second, the increasing prevalence of transnational families, encompassing those raising their children in foreign countries and those composed of parents from different national backgrounds.

The study's focus on international preschools as a facet of international schooling enabled the exploration of novel dimensions of international education linked to the young age of the children. By bridging multiple research domains, including international education, parenting cultures, gender, early multilingualism, and preschool choice, it offers insights into how families navigate the pursuit of international experiences when their children are mere infants and toddlers, a period when the possession and possibilities for activating the worth of such assets are still unclear. Furthermore, directing attention to the preschool level, characterised by a combined education and care philosophy, provided an avenue to examine the intersection of internationality and this particular educational framework. The study also underscores the role of parenting and parenting cultures, framing preschool choice as a parenting practice embedded within cultural norms. By highlighting parenting and cultural dimensions of choosing international education, the study placed families as the unit of analysis, with their dynamics at the forefront. This approach captured how families' configurations of gender, social class, languages, migration histories, and social resources were influential in their encounters with international preschools in a marketised preschool landscape.

Theoretically, the study positioned itself within a Bourdieusian perspective. It draws on the notion of institutions gaining social significance in relation to others, as well as the relevance of social class and distinctions in the context of international education and educational choice. The thesis studied international preschools within a broader but local context, a preschool landscape. This landscape is conceived as a socially structured educational market where families' values and beliefs are brought to the forefront. Additionally, it delves into the complexities of families, recognising them as composed of parents with potentially divergent social characteristics and resources. Consequently, the thesis conceived preschool choice as intricately intertwined with the collective family endeavour undertaken in the upbringing of their children. However, it also recognised that families' first encounter with institutionalised education represents a critical juncture where the nature and direction of this collective endeavour may be challenged or renegotiated. This approach emerged as particularly salient when considering the various structural factors within families, such as gender, social resources, and migration experiences.

The study adopted a mixed methods approach, using statistical techniques, predominantly Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), and qualitative interviews. The statistical analysis examined the social recruitment to international preschools (defined as preschools offering foreign language provision), considering not only class (as measured through education and income level) but distinctions between social fractions and groups (concerning educational track and migration), which shed light on the objective social structures shaping educational choices among families – their competition for social positions and how these translate into choices within the preschool landscape. The study also incorporated interviews with parents of children attending international preschools. This qualitative component sought to explore how families, the majority of whom hailed from middle-class migrant backgrounds, experience and navigate this socially structured educational landscape. It examined how the dynamics of families, structured through their migration, experiences, gender, and social resources, play out within their families and how this relates to their choices for their children. Whilst the statistical analysis studied the choice outcomes (where parents enrolled their children), the interviews contextualised these decisions within the dynamics of families – the relationships between family members. The statistical analysis, referenced throughout the thesis, informs the qualitative analyses. Interviewees are incorporated into the social structures found in the statistical analysis, with their social positions considered when analysing their stories, perceptions, practices, and beliefs.

In the first empirical chapter, Chapter Five, the objective structures between all unique families (the parents) engaging with the preschool landscape in Stockholm between the years 2016 and 2020 were examined. Through Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), the main oppositions and distinctions in these families' configurations of social characteristics were mapped into a multidimensional social space. The social attributes studied included those re-

lated to class distinctions and prevailing forms of power and advantage, such as economic capital, alongside other forms of symbolic differentiation, including educational investments and migration histories. The most dominating opposition existed between resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants. The second most dominant opposition was between highly educated public-sector families and affluent private-sector families. The third and final opposition identified was between established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences.

The main results of the chapter stemmed from the analysis of the locations of preschools within these social structures, which represented the central point for family recruitment. The findings highlighted that international preschools, at a general level, do not solely cater to one specific social group or fraction, nor are they limited to serving particular demographic segments. They do not occupy a distinctly elite position nor demonstrate that specific social groups exclusively value internationality. Each institution had its own recruitment demographic, and while many may hold similar positions, they are distributed throughout the space, indicating that diverse families engage with international preschool education. Moreover, each international preschool was located near other non-international preschools, illustrating that socially similar families also enrolled at non-international preschools.

The chapter also explored the distribution of preschools with different language profiles in this space. The primary insights gleaned from this chapter underscored the significance of the language offerings of international preschools in shaping their social recruitment dynamics. Some languages were shown to possess more limited symbolic value, while others attracted a broader demographic. Somali preschools were found to be primarily associated with resource-weak recent migrant families with lower educational and economic capital. Their form of internationality emerged as somewhat unrecognised by the dominant Swedish middle class, who, while found to attend other language-profiled international preschools, were not often enrolled in Somali-speaking preschools. English-speaking preschools, conversely, held a wider social value. Some institutions were more associated with resource-rich Swedish families and others with resource-weak recent migrants. A number had recruitment that was typically made up of middle-class established migrants.

The German and French preschools' recruitment was slightly more associated with the resource-rich than resource-weak; however, their locations in the space suggested somewhat weak associations with the dominating oppositions among families. In both cases, they were characterised more by affluent families in the private sector than those in the public sector. Additionally, they exhibited a closer link with established migrant families in the natural sciences than those in the humanities and social sciences. The location of the one Spanish and one Estonian preschool provided little possibility for sociological interpretation; their recruitment was not particularly distinct in relation to the social structures unveiled. The two Greek preschools had distinct positions from one another; one held a

location that did not allow much interpretation, but the other tended to be more clearly linked with recent migrant families with lower educational and economic capital, which was consistent throughout the other oppositions.

In Chapter Six, the analysis focused on 36 families (comprising mothers, fathers, or both parents) whose children attend either an English, French, or Somali international preschool. These families were projected into the social space framework established in the previous chapter, which revealed their predominantly middle-class positions. However, notable distinctions between them were identified and employed within the analysis. Therefore, this chapter delved into how families navigated the broader preschool landscape while acknowledging that they still operated within a specific social realm. For the most part, families had explored the possibility of non-international preschools for their children, primarily due to the relatively small number of international preschools.

Two primary themes emerged in this chapter: one focused on the educational content of preschools, while the other revolved around Swedish culture, which was perceived to extend into preschools. Families navigated both aspects by categorising certain aspects as either “national”, “Swedish”, or “international”. Consequently, they evaluated the suitability of preschools, whether non-international or international, as well as the specific form of internationality, based on how these categories resonated with their family dynamics and identities. Central to this chapter is the recognition that the convergence of social class and particular forms of internationality frequently enabled middle-class families with foreign backgrounds, whether one or both parents, to sidestep the need to root themselves in national educational spheres and “Swedish” arenas. This dynamic was particularly evident among those who opted for English or French-speaking international preschools. Their socio-economic backgrounds, coupled with their possession of specific transnational resources, afforded them the luxury of bypassing national investments in Sweden – a privilege not readily available to less privileged migrant groups.

The educational content of “Swedish” preschools was compared to that of international preschools and that of other national contexts. Sweden’s ECEC stood out for many families due to its unitary system and strong *educare* philosophy. Those with access to the economic resources could completely avoid this model of ECEC by attending one of two fee-charging international preschools. Others opted for publicly funded international preschools that were often deemed more academic than “Swedish” preschools, or the possibility of learning a foreign language was seen as a tangible skill not accessible through non-international preschools. However, this perspective was not universal. Somali preschools, as perceived by attending parents, were regarded as no different from other preschools. These parents emphasised their preschools’ similarity to non-international preschools.

The theme of Swedish culture was linked to notions of education, especially amongst those navigating the publicly funded system. The chapter highlighted how families, particularly those whose children attended an English international pre-



school, grappled with their own parenting cultures while raising their children and navigating the preschool landscape in Sweden. While often assuming similarities with their Swedish counterparts, they encountered new cultural norms. Interactions with Swedes influenced their preschool choices, as these experiences moulded perceptions of whether they aligned more closely with Swedes or identified as part of an international group. Non-Swedish parents often attributed particular child-rearing styles and cultural attributes, including language usage, to Swedish norms and were perceived to be mirrored in preschool environments. When these norms clashed with the values and cultures of parents, the preference for internationally orientated preschools was reinforced. Furthermore, parents sometimes discovered that their practices, including language use, were not acknowledged in specific Swedish social settings, such as visits to potential non-international preschools. In instances where these environments failed to accommodate them – a common practice within their social groups – parents felt excluded, rendering them more akin to other migrant groups rather than privileged migrants.

The chapter highlighted that parents' attempts to activate their symbolic capital, such as their language or international assets, were not universally acknowledged. Non-international preschools were viewed as environments where this symbolic currency held little value. Thus, they were to be avoided, with preference given to arenas where their assets were recognised. Consequently, their sense of belonging was shaped by their ability to have their symbolic assets recognised. This process extended to families where one parent was Swedish, and the other was not, highlighting how parents with both Swedish and certain foreign cultures, typically aligned with dominant forms of internationality, sought out environments that recognised both cultural backgrounds and associated assets. Therefore, each international preschool was evaluated based on whether it recognised both aspects of their family, encompassing both the international and Swedish sides, rather than solely focusing on one or the other.

In Chapter Seven, the analysis focused on language dynamics, particularly aspects of multilingualism. Consistent with the previous chapter, interviews with parents, and their positions in the social space, formed the foundation of the analysis. In addition, a statistical analysis of commuting patterns to international preschools was incorporated. The chapter adopted a broad definition of multilingualism, recognising its diversity, but emphasised families where parents had different native languages. Enrolling children in international preschools offering a language different from their home language was perceived by the families to provide linguistic advantages at an early age. However, it could also be seen to jeopardise families' assumed natural transmission of one of their most vital symbolic resources – their native language. This phenomenon was observed across Swedish and non-Swedish families.

For families aiming for nationally orientated educational paths, especially within non-international schools with good reputations and academic achievements, international preschools were seen as an opportunity to expose children to languages without compromising other learning milestones. Con-

versely, families with limited Swedish-specific resources viewed non-international routes in Sweden as unfeasible, planning instead for their children to attend international schools. International preschools set them on this path. Additionally, families contemplating potential moves to other countries saw enrolling their children in English (and sometimes French) preschools as a strategy to transition into education abroad. Families with their sights on their children attending the French international school saw a necessity to invest in French at an international preschool to prepare them for the admission language tests.

Despite speaking these languages at home, they recognised potential disadvantages for their children compared to those with only French spoken at home. Thus, bilingualism was perceived as potentially hindering complete language mastery, especially for young children. Preschools served as the primary choice for Somali-speaking education, as no Somali international schools were available. The absence of a continued educational pathway for Somali speakers was linked to the perceived necessity for their children's proficient mastery of Swedish, a requirement not consistently applicable to other families interviewed. Commuting patterns reflected the perceived necessity for specific languages, with longer commutes for families opting for French preschools compared to more geographically constrained areas for Somali preschools.

Two constellations of family multilingualism were identified among these middle-class families. One involved parents with different native languages, while the other featured one Swedish-speaking parent, particularly significant in the Swedish context. For families with different native languages, raising young children to acquire at least two languages proved challenging, particularly during the early stages of language acquisition in the first few years of preschool. These families, who had previously established their language practices before becoming parents, adjusted these practices upon the birth of their children, with several observing that their young children developed a preference for one parent's language. Mothers' tongues tended to advance to a higher degree at this stage, and preschool environments played a crucial role in parents' efforts to navigate and address these linguistic imbalances. Negotiations within families centred around preschool choices to support weaker languages or address linguistic imbalances. These negotiations could be a source of contention, particularly regarding responsibility for linguistic imbalances and the dominance of the mother's tongue.

Ultimately, the chapter highlighted that while the linguistic focus of international preschools influenced parents' decisions, it did not guarantee the effortless transmission of linguistic advantages. However, families with languages represented in international preschools had an advantage; they could use them as a tool for language transmission. This underscored the emergence of utilising preschools in multilingual family projects and the introduction of new dynamics to the lives of multilingual families, albeit limited to languages offered by international preschools.

Chapter Eight, the final empirical chapter, delved into families categorised as privileged employment migrants, exploring the dynamics within these families,

with a particular emphasis on gender. It was illustrated how the already gendered process of raising young children was heightened within families experiencing privileged migration. This gendered pattern significantly influenced how families made choices regarding preschool for their children, a responsibility that typically fell within the domain of mothers.

The chapter illustrated how the social positions that parents held outside their families were reproduced within their family dynamics. It explored families where both parents were not Swedish, as well as those where one parent was Swedish, and the other was not. Many patterns regarding the impact of migration on family dynamics were apparent across these groups. Primarily, among the interviewees fitting the definition of privileged employment-facilitated migration, the fathers' occupations often drove their cross-border mobility. This tended to reinforce their positions outside the family, as fathers continued to invest in their careers. At the same time, mothers faced more challenging conditions in their transitions to new national labour markets. The significance of employment and belonging to specific occupational fields became evident, as did the timing within individuals' careers when mobility occurred.

These so-called accompanying parents found it easier to establish themselves in their new national contexts when working in private sector occupations not tied to national certification or the need for Swedish language proficiency. Industries like technology, business, and finance appeared more accessible to these individuals. Similarly, certain public sector professions, such as academia, were also areas where mobile individuals had better luck gaining access. However, professions within the public sector that demanded proficiency in Swedish or required national certification, such as health and social care, posed more significant challenges and demanded substantial investments to access. Many individuals were unwilling to make such investments, especially when their stays were considered temporary.

The chapter also highlighted the relevance of the career progression of these accompanying parents. Many families, despite having been mobile in the past, had spent periods in countries where the accompanying parent established their careers. They desired to return to their careers after having children. No longer solely focused on caring for dependent children, they sought to re-enter the labour market but faced challenges caused by their relocation. While they may have previously been comfortable with starting anew in different countries, enjoying mobility and acquiring transnational resources through social interactions, once they had established their careers, these transnational assets held less value unless they added to their already valuable occupational position. For many of these accompanying parents, typically mothers, there was a need and desire to invest in their partners' careers for the advantages it provided to the family as a whole, both economically and symbolically. Their role within the family as the primary carer, already influenced by gender norms, became solidified. However, the chapter highlighted that social positions outside of the family alone were insufficient to organise family dynamics when raising children. Even mothers who had led

mobility tended to take on the primary responsibility for their young children, highlighting the prevalence of gendered norms in these situations.

When these mobile families comprised a Swedish parent, a new dynamic emerged within their imbalances. The parents leading the mobility, often the holders of certain international assets, had access to Swedish resources, whether it was language proficiency, cultural similarity, or social and occupational networks that could be converted into new species of capital. Once again, the chapter underscored the gender imbalance. Mothers who were not Swedish found themselves renegotiating their identities within their once international families, now leaning towards becoming more Swedish. Despite dealing with their disadvantage in the Swedish context, they took on the predominant role in choosing preschools for their children. They navigated their way through the bureaucratic system, attempting to leverage their often-deemed insufficient cultural assets. “International” social circles, whether these were “expat” parenting groups or international preschools, functioned as valuable resources for these mothers and families. The existence of such middle-class social networks that recognised the worth of international assets and experiences allowed mothers and families less able to secure themselves in local Swedish groups to swiftly establish themselves in a national context with socially similar counterparts.

In conclusion, the thesis shed light on the intricate dynamics surrounding international preschool choices within a broader but local preschool landscape. Through examining the interplay between social hierarchies, parenting cultures, and educational offers, the study revealed that the choice of international preschools, and preschool choice in general, is embedded within familial negotiations and societal structures. The transmission of transnational assets to young children through the family or international preschools was shown to be an aspect of ambivalence for parents, who navigated worth of these assets in specific social arenas. These assets were negotiated within the local context, rooted in the interplay between the offerings of international preschools and the specific meanings they held for families from diverse national backgrounds, each harbouring unique visions for their children’s futures. Transnational assets encompassed various elements, including languages and cultures, the value of which was contingent upon the social positions of families and parents – within both national and international spheres, their migration histories, and planned futures. When evaluating these attributes, families consistently assessed their relevance within national contexts, whether it be for accessing countries through mastery of the dominant language or participation in international schools in specific national contexts.

Thus, the thesis highlighted the significance of studying educational choices within their local social contexts. While specific global patterns emerged in the study, such as the prevalence of English in international preschools, the local context added nuanced meanings to these dynamics. Moreover, the thesis highlighted the role of children as agents in family dynamics, influencing parental decisions and contributing to the renegotiation of family-specific beliefs and

practices. Overall, the thesis contributed to a deeper understanding of how families make educational decisions and emphasised the importance of considering familial dynamics (including children), societal structures, and local contexts.



# Appendices

## Appendix A: Supplements to Chapter 5

Table 6. Active variables and categories grouped by their contributions on axis 1–3.

Axis 1					
Variable	Ctr	Positive coord.	Ctr	Negative coord.	Ctr
Income	31.5	Low	10.4	Mid-High	6.7
		Mid-Low	8.8	High	5.3
Education Level	29.4	Compulsory/Up.sec.	14.5	HE <= 4 years	11.2
Mothers Age	19.9	Younger	14.7		
Immigration	14.1	Recent	5.5	Never	6.5
		Total	53.9	Total	29.7
Axis2					
Variable	Ctr	Positive coord.	Ctr	Negative coord.	Ctr
Education Track	38.2	Health, Serv. & Soc care	17.2	Admin & Economy	15.4
Employment Sector	36.9	Public	26.4	Private	10.5
Education Level	12.6	HE > 4 years	8.8		
Income	9.6			High	5.8
		Total	52.4	Total	31.7
Axis3					
Variable	Ctr	Positive coord.	Ctr	Negative coord.	Ctr
Education Track	41.1	Nat. Sc. & Eng	18.6	Hum & Soc. Sc.	18.9
Education Level	38.1	HE > 4 years	31.8	HE <= 4 years	6.2
Immigration	9.6	2005–2013	7.6		
		Total	58.0	Total	25.1

Figure 12. The space of individuals, plane 1–2.

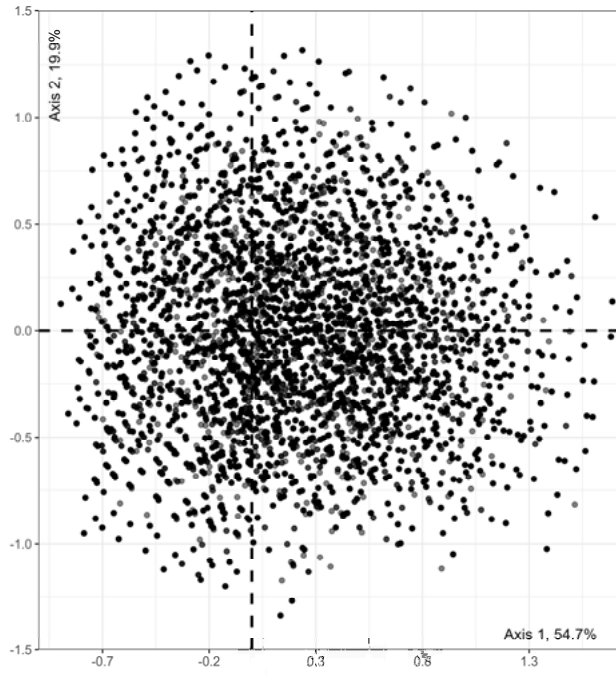


Figure 13. The space of individuals, plane 1–3.

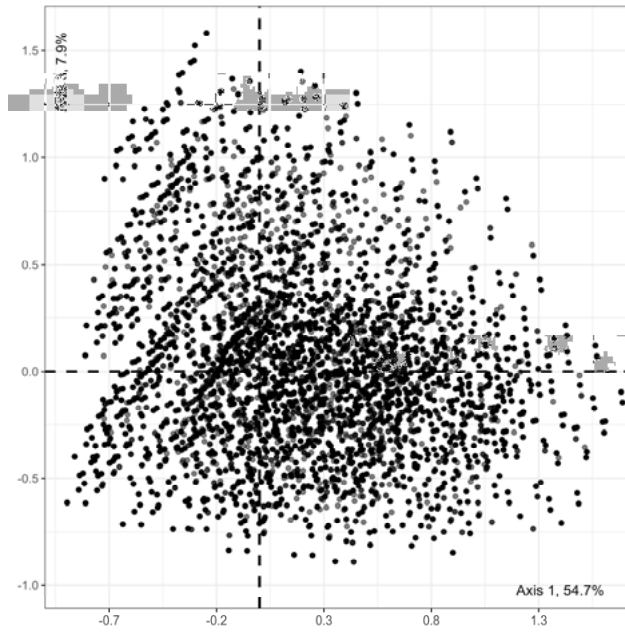
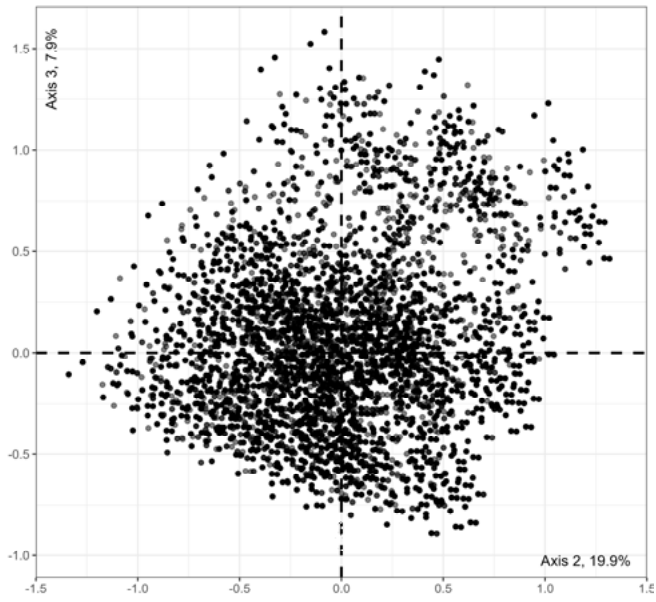




Figure 14. The space of individuals, plane 2–3.



## Appendix B: Preschools Attended by Interview Participants' Children

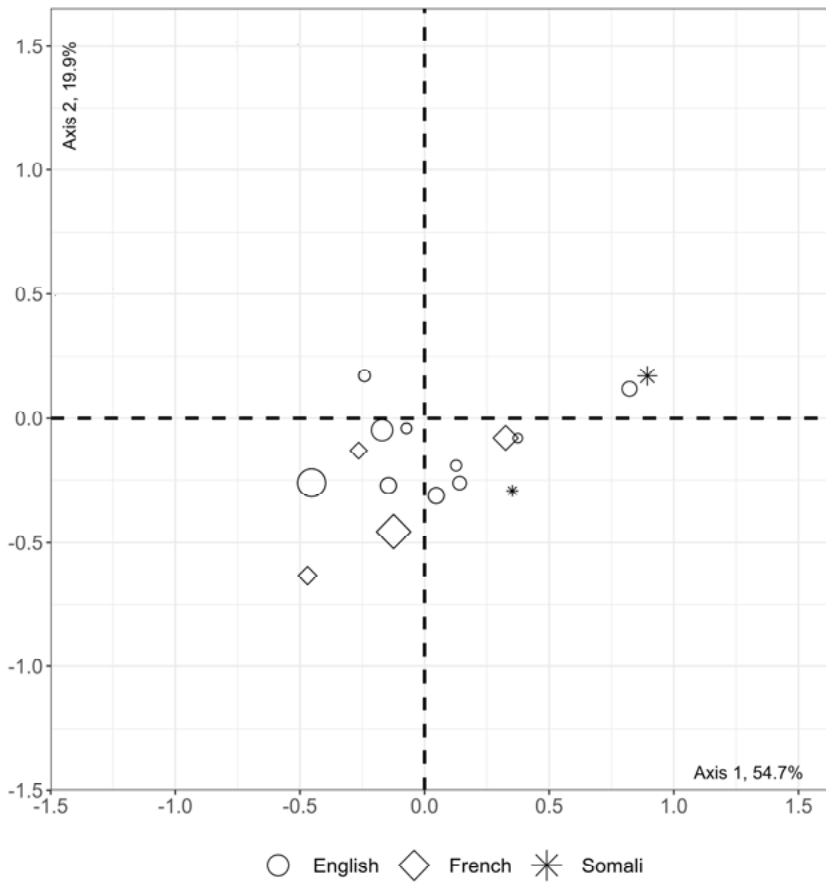
The figures in this appendix are based on the MCA analysis in Chapter Five. Thus, whilst this appendix is referred to in Chapter Four, a complete understanding of the figures is not possible until after reading Chapter Five. In Figure 15, the positions of the preschools attended by the children of the interviewees are shown in relation to axes one and two, which captured the oppositions of resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants and highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families.<sup>439</sup> The languages offered by the preschools are indicated, which are either English, French, or Somali. For the most part, the preschools are located towards the middle of the space, suggesting that their recruitment is not so particular in relation to the structures found in axes one and two.<sup>440</sup> However, a number are positioned towards the resource-rich side of the space than the resource-weak. The interviewees often described their perceptions of the other families attending their preschools. These descriptions usually suggested that these preschools catered for families with Swedish backgrounds and those with foreign backgrounds, with all these families seeming to have similar social class backgrounds (typically middle-class occupations and educational levels). However, two preschools are located towards the right, illustrating that their recruitment tends to be characterised by resource-weak families that have recently migrated to Sweden. One of these preschools is Somali-speaking, with Elmi being the interviewee associated with this preschool. The other is English, and Raisa was the interviewee whose child attended this setting. Both are located in less affluent suburbs of Stockholm, the Somali-speaking preschool to the north of the city and the English-speaking to the south.

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<sup>439</sup> Two preschools, those fee-charging institutions, are not found within the register data so are not included within the figures in this appendix.

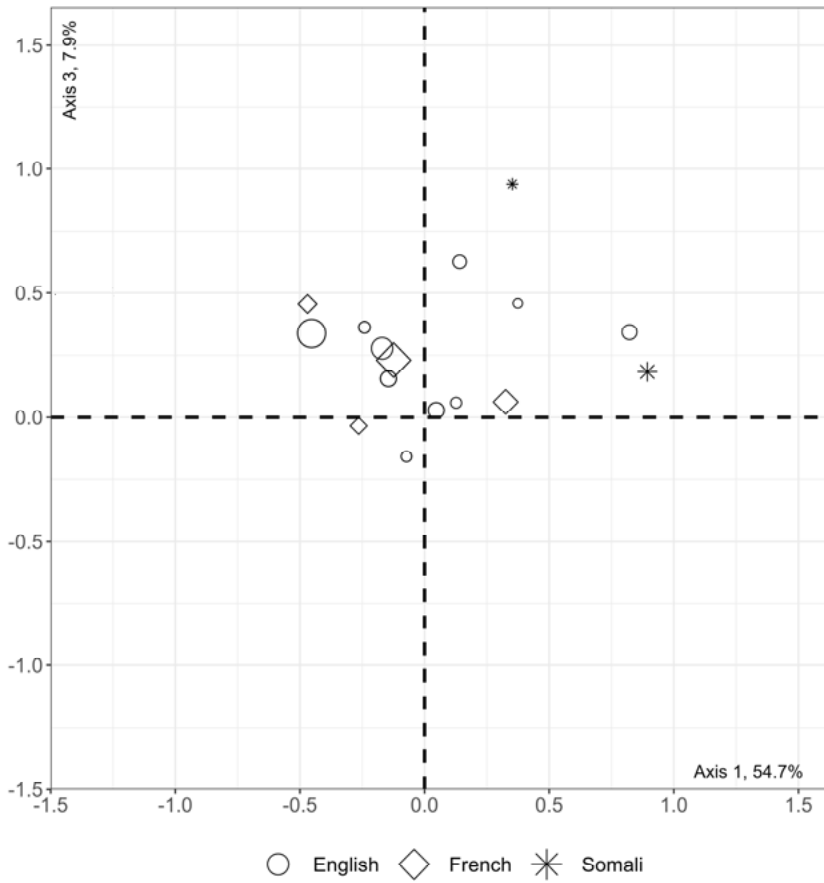
<sup>440</sup> Preschools with distances of 0.5 suggest significant differences in recruitment Le Roux and Rouanet, *Geometric Data Analysis*, 197–98; Le Roux and Rouanet, *Multiple Correspondence Analysis*, 59.

Figure 15. Preschools attended by interview participants' children, plane 1–2.



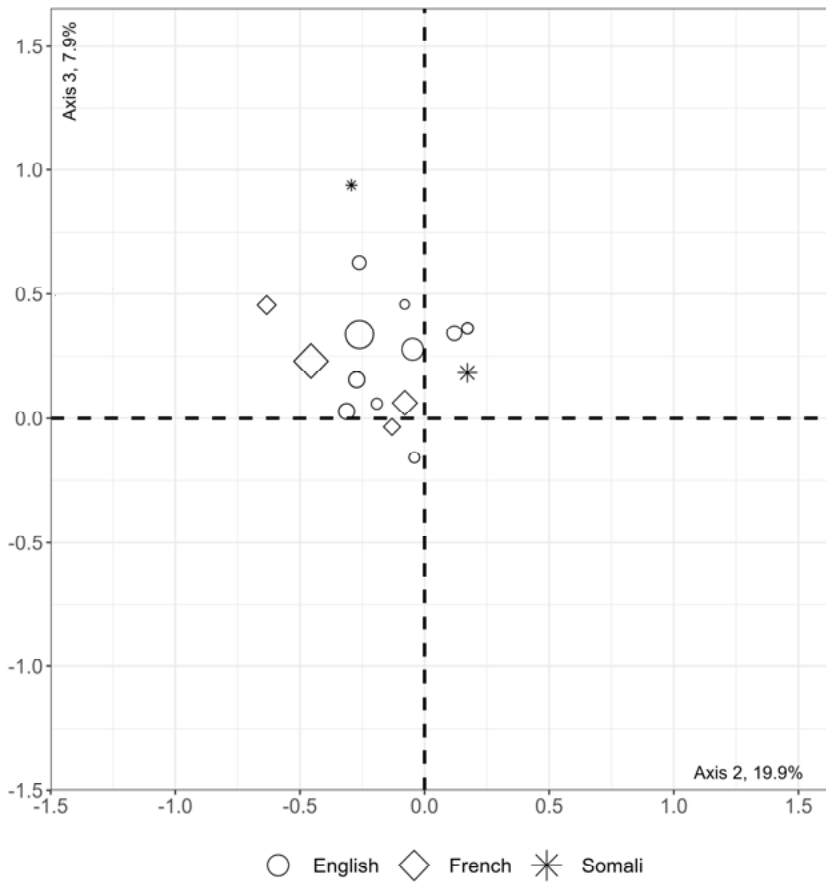
In Figure 16, the same preschools are shown at the intersection of axes one and three: the oppositions between resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants and established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. Again, many of the preschools are located in the middle of the space. However, they are generally positioned more to the top of the space than the bottom, suggesting they are more associated with established migrant families in the natural sciences than those in the humanities and social sciences.

Figure 16. Preschools attended by interview participants' children, plane 1–3.



In Figure 17, the same preschools are again shown, this time at the intersection of axes two and three: the oppositions between highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families and established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. In this intersection, less can be said about the recruitment patterns of these preschools. However, they can be seen, for the most part, to be slightly more associated with the private sector and they are less characterised by families from the humanities and social sciences, instead leaning towards the top of the space where established migrants from the natural sciences are found.

Figure 17. Preschools attended by interview participants' children, plane 2–3.



## Appendix C: Interview Guide for Parents

<b>Choosing Preschool</b>
Can you describe the process of when you started thinking about preschool? What were your criteria for preschool? Which other preschools did you consider?
<b>Experience of Preschool</b>
Can you describe your preschool? Which aspects do you like/not like? Do you have much contact with other parents at the preschool?
<b>Later School Choice</b>
Have you considered schools? Which schools are you interested in? Have you joined any waiting lists?
<b>Languages</b>
What language/s do you speak at home? What languages do you want your child to learn?
<b>Mobility</b>
History of mobility Countries lived in and when Where were they living when they had children Plans for mobility
<b>Social Background</b>
Nationality Occupational and educational histories Their parents' occupational and educational histories

## Appendix D: Interview Participants in a Social Space of Families

Such as in Appendix B, understanding this appendix depends on the MCA results in Chapter Five. The figures presented are the space of individuals, as discussed in Chapter Five. In all figures, the faded circles represent individuals included in the MCA analysis, i.e., the constellations of social characteristics among these individuals are the foundation of the MCA. The named black circles represent the interviewees (with aliases used for parents who participated in the interview), some of whom may have been active individuals in the space, but their identities are indistinguishable. Thus, they have been projected into the space to distinguish their positions by using the same social characteristics employed within the MCA. Their social characteristics were mostly gathered during the interviews. However, as their incomes were not collected, these were estimated based on the average income for their respective occupations, with adjustments made according to any additional information provided during the interviews. Consequently, their social positions may not be entirely precise. Nonetheless, the figures illustrate, to a reasonable degree, where these interviewees are situated relative to the broader population of studied families. The aggregation of families follows the same methodology as the MCA analysis, wherein family units are formed based on two parents sharing the same priorities outlined in Chapter Five.

Figure 18. Interviewees in plane 1–2.

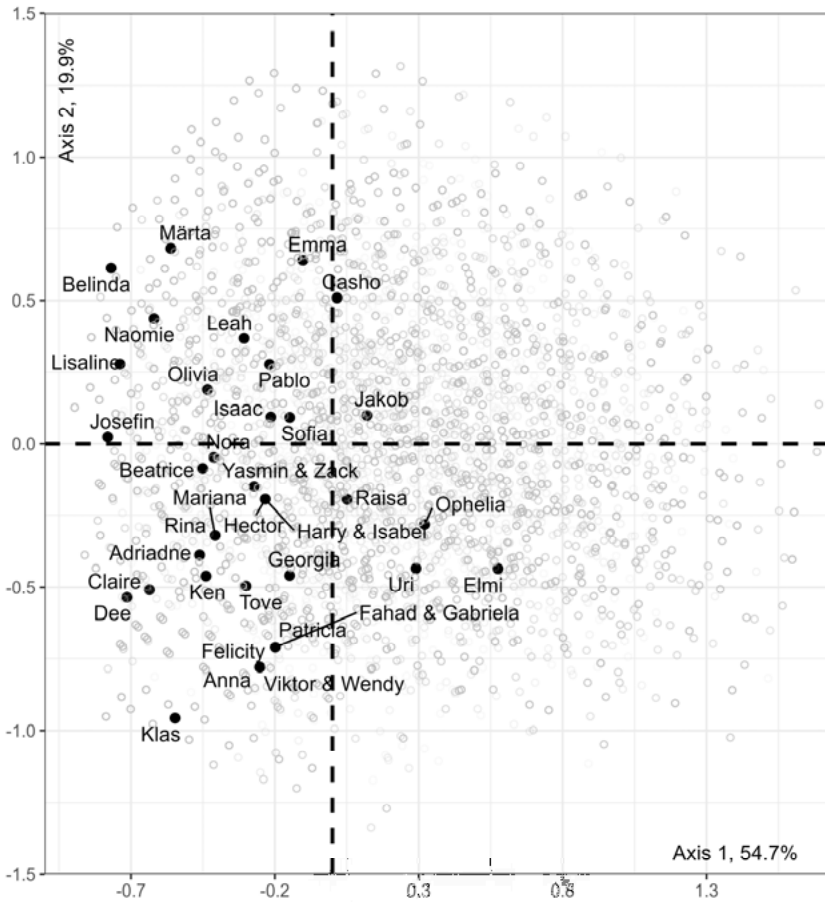
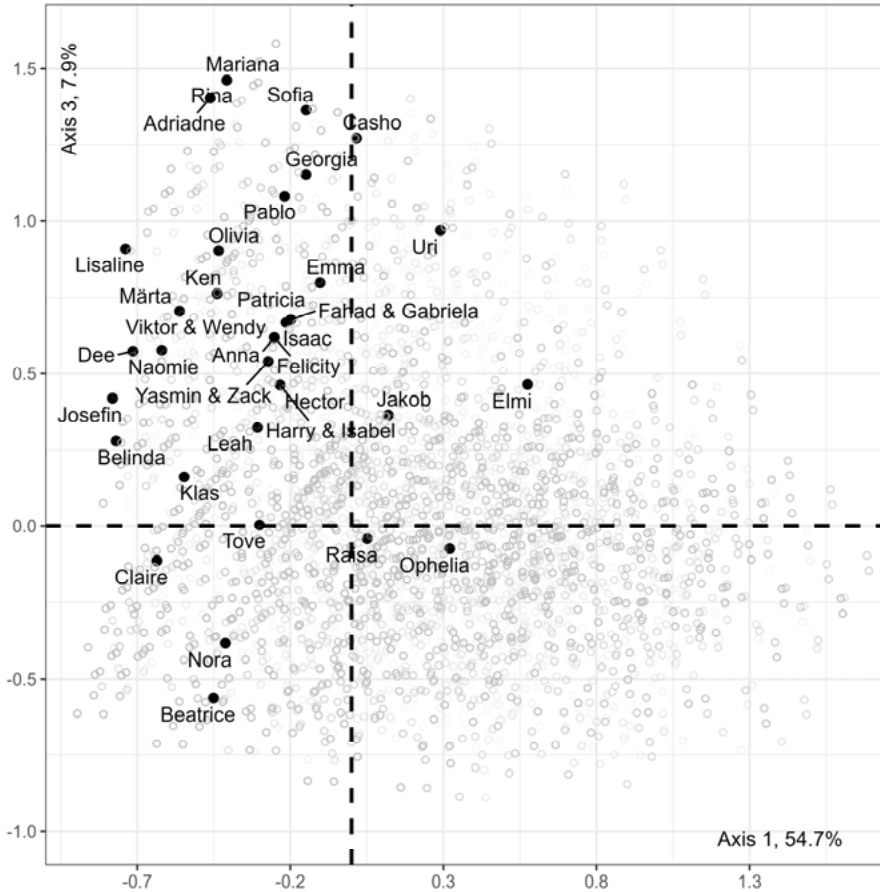


Figure 18 shows the positions of interviewed families on the intersection of axes one and two, which captures the oppositions between resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants and highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families. The interviewees are predominantly found to the left of the space where resource-rich Swedish families are found. However, most of these families do not have Swedish backgrounds; instead, their possession of educational and economic capital draws them to this side of the space. They are distributed along the second axis, with highly educated families working in the public sector, such as Märta, Belinda, and Emma, positioned furthest to the top of the space. Those in the private sector, such as Klas, Viktor and Wendy, and Anna, are found furthest down towards the area of affluent private-sector families, with their positions, either in their own companies or employment in large international companies, contributing to their locations in the space. Thus, their positions in this intersection highlight their relative similarity in terms of social class. Even individuals who attended one of the preschools situated to the right



of this intersection, such as Elmi, are not typical of the recruitment profile of her preschool. Instead, she exhibits higher levels of education and secure economic assets, positioning her closer to the middle of the space rather than the right.

Figure 19. Interviewees in plane 1–3.

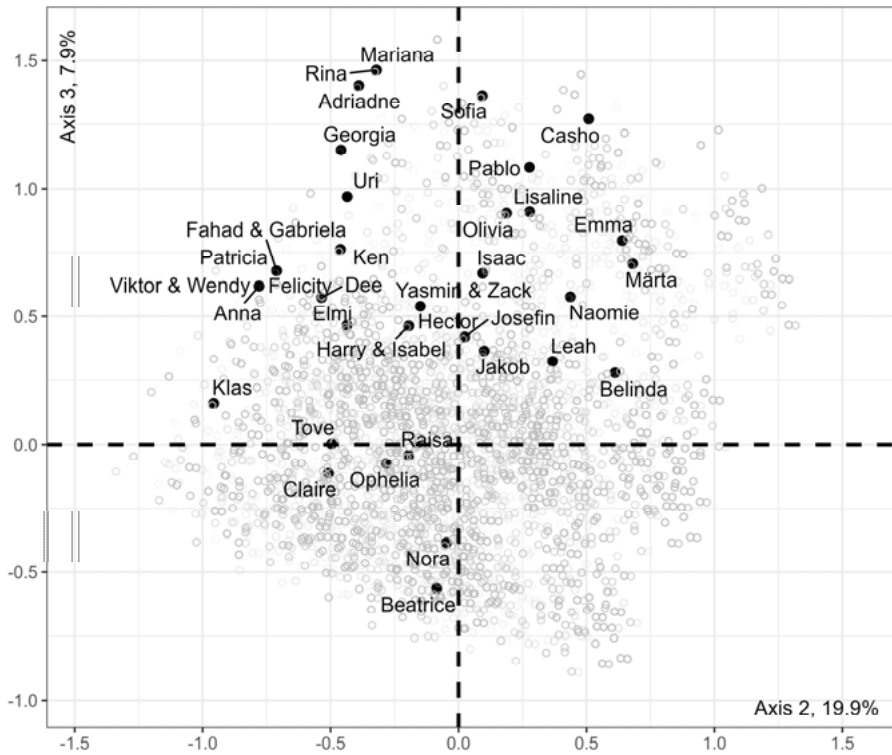


In Figure 19, the same interview participants are shown in the space of individuals, this time in relation to axes one and three. These axes captured the oppositions between resource-rich Swedes and resource-weak recent migrants and established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. Again, most interviewees are found towards the left of the space, where educational and economic resources are stronger. However, most are positioned at the top of the space where established migrant families in the natural sciences are located. As such, this intersection also captures their migration backgrounds; the majority are resource-rich families with some form of migration history. A couple of interviewees, Nora and Beatrice, are found at the bottom of the space among families in the humanities and social sciences. Of

these two families, Nora is one of the only families comprised of two Swedish parents, and Beatrice is Swedish but has a non-Swedish partner.

Figure 20 shows the interviewees in the intersection of axes two and three: the oppositions between highly educated public sector families and affluent private sector families, and established migrant families in the natural sciences and families in the humanities and social sciences. Here, it becomes apparent that many of the interviewees are characterised as belonging to the groups of established migrant families in the natural sciences. However, there are differences in their association with the public and private sectors. Those in the private sector are found to the left, and those in the public sector are on the right.

Figure 20. Interviewees in plane 2–3.



## Appendix E: Parent Participants

Parent	Regionalised Nationality	Educational background	Occupation	Transnational attributes from family/childhood	Transnational attributes from adulthood
<i>Ariadne</i>	European	Longer HE	Art worker	Strong	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	IT-Professional	Weak	Weak
<i>Anna</i>	North American	HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Higher official	Weak	Strong
<i>Belinda</i>	European	Longer HE	University teacher, researcher	Medium/weak	Medium
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	IT-Professional	-	Weak
<i>Beatrice</i>	Swedish	HE	Office employee	Strong	Medium
Parent 2	North American	HE	Mid-level civil servant	-	-
<i>Casho</i>	African	Longer HE	Teacher	Strong	Medium
Parent 2	African	Longer HE	Technician, engineer	Strong	Strong
<i>Claire</i>	European	HE	Office employee	Strong	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	HE	Chief executive officer	Strong	Strong
<i>Dee</i>	North American	HE	Higher official	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Higher official	Weak	Medium
<i>Elmi</i>	African	HE	Nurse	Strong	Weak
Parent 2	African	Shorter HE	Trade employee	-	-
<i>Emma</i>	European	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	European	HE	Higher official	Weak	Strong
<i>Felicity</i>	North American	No HE	Mid-level civil servant	Strong	Medium
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Chief executive officer	Weak	Strong
<i>Fahad</i>	European, African	Longer HE	IT professional	Strong	Strong
<i>Gabriela</i>	North American, South American	Longer HE	IT professional	Strong	Strong
<i>Georgia</i>	European	Longer HE	University teacher, researcher	Strong	Strong
Parent 2	European	Longer HE	Chief executive officer	Strong	Strong
<i>Harry</i>	European	Longer HE	Chief executive officer	Weak	Strong
<i>Isabel</i>	European	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Medium
<i>Hector</i>	South American	Longer HE	Privately empl specialist	Medium	Strong
Parent 2	European	Longer HE	Privately empl specialist	Strong	Strong
<i>Isaac</i>	European	Longer HE	Culture intermediary	Weak	Medium
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Leading positions gov.	Medium	Strong
<i>Jakob</i>	Swedish	Shorter HE	IT professional	Weak	Medium
Parent 2	North American, South American	Longer HE	Teacher	Strong	Medium
<i>Josefin</i>	Swedish	Longer HE	IT professional	Weak	Medium
Parent 2	Swedish	HE	IT professional	-	-
<i>Ken</i>	Asian	HE	IT professional	Medium	Weak
Parent 2	Asian	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	-	-
<i>Klas</i>	Swedish	HE	Higher official	Strong	Medium
Parent 2	Swedish	Shorter HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Medium
<i>Leah</i>	North American	Longer HE	University teacher, researcher	Medium	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	University teacher, researcher	Strong	Strong
<i>Lisaline</i>	European	HE	Mid-level civil servant	Strong	Medium
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Higher official	Weak	Medium
<i>Mariana</i>	North American, South American	Longer HE	Higher official	Strong	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Technician	Weak	Strong
<i>Märta</i>	Swedish	Longer HE	University teacher, researcher	Medium	Strong
Parent 2	European	Longer HE	Teacher	Strong	Strong
<i>Nora</i>	Swedish	HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Shorter HE	IT professional	Strong	Weak
<i>Naomie</i>	European	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	Swedish	Longer HE	Higher official	Weak	Strong
<i>Olivia</i>	North American	Longer HE	Teacher	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	North American	Longer HE	Teacher	Weak	Strong
<i>Opheelia</i>	North American	HE	Trained workers (Service)	Weak	Medium
Parent 2	North American	HE	Higher official	-	Medium
<i>Patricia</i>	Asian	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Strong
Parent 2	Asian, Australasian	-	Higher official	Strong	Strong
<i>Raisa</i>	European	HE	Caretaker, attendant	Weak	Medium
Parent 2	European	-	Craftsman	-	Medium

## PLAYING WITH THE GLOBAL

<i>Rina</i>	European	Longer HE	IT-professional	Weak	Medium
Parent 2	European	Longer HE	IT-professional	Weak	Medium
<i>Sofia</i>	European	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	Strong	Strong
Parent 2	European	No HE	Trained workers (Service)	Weak	Strong
<i>Tove</i>	Swedish	Shorter HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Weak/medium
Parent 2	Swedish	No HE	Mid-level civil servant		
<i>Uri</i>	European	Longer HE	IT-Professional	Weak	Weak
Parent 2	European	Longer HE	IT-Professional		Weak
<i>Viktor</i>	European	No HE	Mid-level civil servant	Weak	Strong
<i>Wendy</i>	North American, South American	Longer HE	Higher official	Strong	Strong
<i>Yasmin</i>	African	Longer HE	Mid-level civil servant	Strong	Strong
<i>Zack</i>	European	Longer HE	Technicians	Weak	Strong

## Appendix F: Interview Guide for Staff

<b>Finding their Employment</b>
Can you describe how you ended up working at your preschool? Which other preschools have you worked in?
<b>Later Employment Plans</b>
Do you plan to continue working in international preschools? What sort of preschools would you like to work in?
<b>Pedagogical Approach</b>
How do you work with languages in your preschool? In what way is your preschools similar/different to others? How do you manage cultures in the school? Are there particularities to working with nationally diverse children? How do you experience parental expectations?
<b>Mobility</b>
History of mobility Countries lived in and when Plans for mobility
<b>Social Background</b>
Nationality Occupational and educational histories Their parents' occupational and educational histories



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